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ABSTRACT

Prepared as part of a series applying recent research in oral and written communication instruction to classroom practice, this booklet discusses three visual models of teaching written composition. The first section of the booklet discusses the content area model, which begins with an abstraction presented to students (definitions of parts of speech or rules for subject-verb agreement, for example), then moves to models or examples, such as sample paragraphs or model short stories. The section also examines the shortcomings and the strengths of the model. The second section deals with the mastery model, a visual interpretation of B. Bloom's ideas, analyzing its flaws and advantages. The third section presents the writing process model, a synthesis of ideas from D. Graves, J. Britton, G. Stanford, and others. The discussion covers the various stages of the model, including prewriting, drafting, and proofreading, and offers a comparison of the model to others. The booklet concludes with three "excursions," extended treatments of several points related to the topic of models, including talk in the classroom, revision and teacher feedback, and the writing process, mechanics, and nonstandard English. Examples of student work are used throughout the booklet. (FL)

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Thinking Visually About Writing: Three Models for Teaching Composition, K-12

By Charles Suhor

The Talking and Writing Series, K-12: Successful Classroom Practices

ED233384

The purpose of this series is to provide information to assist teachers and curriculum planners at all grade levels in improving communication skills across the major disciplines.

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PREFACE

During the past decade, teachers, education administrators and researchers, and the general public have become increasingly concerned about students' ability to communicate. This broad public concern for improvement in education led to the enactment of Title II, Basic Skills Improvement Act, Public Law 95-561. The Basic Skills legislation encourages Federal, State, and local education agencies to utilize " . . . all available resources for elementary and secondary education to improve instruction so that all children are able to master the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and effective communication, both written and oral." Section 209 of the act specifically authorizes the Secretary of Education to collect and analyze information about the results of activities carried out under Title II. Thus, improved instruction in the basic communication skills—speaking, listening, and writing—has become the focus of programs and research projects throughout the country.

The booklets in this series, *The Talking and Writing Series, K-12: Successful Classroom Practices*, provide information to assist teachers and curriculum planners at all grade levels to improve communication skills across all major disciplines. Developed under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education, the 12 booklets apply recent research in oral and written communication instruction to classroom practice. They contain descriptions of teaching practices; summaries and analyses of pertinent theories and research findings; practical suggestions for teachers; and lists of references and resources. Also included is a booklet on inservice training which suggests how the series can be used in professional development programs.

The booklets were developed through the efforts of an Editorial Advisory Committee comprised of 14 professionals in both the academic and research areas of written and oral communication education. The group worked with the sponsoring agency, the Department of Education's Basic Skills Improvement Program, and Dingle Associates, Inc., a professional services firm.

The committee members, in consultation with the Department of Education staff, chose issues and developed topics. Ten of the 14 committee members authored papers. The committee reviewed the papers and provided additional expertise in preparing the final booklets, which were edited and designed by Dingle Associates.

We are grateful to the committee members, advisors, and all others who contributed their expertise to the project. The committee members were:

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It is hoped that the booklets in this series will be valuable to classroom and administrative professionals in developing or restructuring their communication skills programs. They may also be useful to community and parent groups in their dialogue with members of the educational system. The ultimate benefit of this project, however, will be realized in our children's enhanced ability to communicate, both orally and in written language.

Sherwood R. Simons
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THINKING VISUALLY ABOUT WRITING: THREE MODELS FOR TEACHING COMPOSITION, K-12

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INTRODUCTION

Models! To quote Charlie Brown, *Aaargh!*

Why use visual models to understand teaching a written form? Weren't there enough visual doodads in the 1960's and 1970's when systems analysts littered curriculum bulletins with flow charts and quasi-scientific claims of precision? Weren't those branching tree diagrams that filled a chalkboard—one student called them "spidery"—enough to frighten many students (and teachers) away from visual models for years to come?

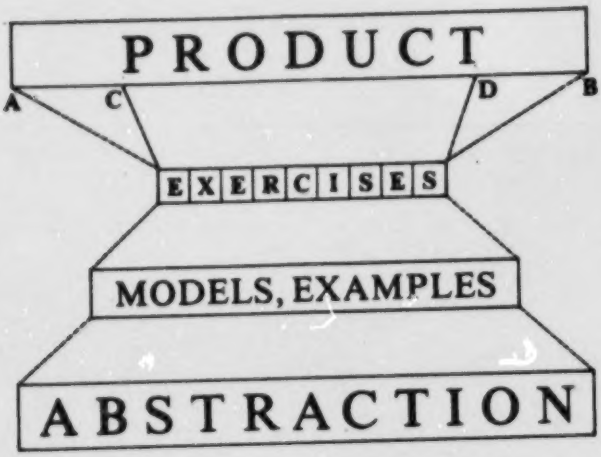
I have always been a compulsively visual teacher; a frustrated cartoonist, in fact. Yet, I agree that many visual models (like those labyrinthine flow charts) were mainly educational graffiti. But some models *can* be illuminating, *can* make important theoretical and practical distinctions, *can* lead to better ideas about what to do on Monday morning. Those headachy tree diagrams, for instance, provided a theoretical basis for sentence-combining, a very practical classroom technique.

Actually, all of us have some kind of model underlying our teaching styles. The model might be eclectic, derived from and perhaps synthesizing various sources. The model might be followed consciously, or it might be implicit in classroom activities and assignments. If there were indeed no model operating as we teach, then teaching—if it could be called that—would be a random, disconnected activity. If a model were followed slavishly, teaching would be a pat, nonadaptive kind of behavior.

What we *do* with a particular visual model seems to be crucial in determining whether it is a deadening academic exercise or a useful teaching guide. This booklet discusses three models of teaching composition—the Content Area Model; the Mastery Model; and the Writing Process Model. I will explain each model, relating it to important issues in English teaching, and discuss classroom applications.

The models are not parallel in form, and each merits a different emphasis in analysis. To fill in some gaps, I will include some submodels. Finally, I will present three "Excursions" of related topics after discussing the three models. I believe that the models are fictions that will ring true—at least partially—to your experience as a teacher. And if you find them to be useful ways of looking at teaching writing, then they will certainly qualify as practical.

THE CONTENT AREA MODEL

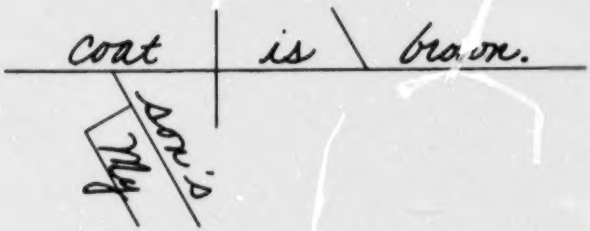


The Content Area Model begins with an *Abstraction* presented to the students—definitions of parts of speech, rules for subject-verb agreement, a description of paragraph structure, a list of elements in the short story, and so on. The students move from these general ideas to specific instances, as seen in "Models" or "Examples." Sample paragraphs, model short stories, or similar illustrative materials flesh out the abstraction under study so that students have a clearer understanding of the concepts. Often, the students' understanding is further refined through "Exercises"—e.g., sentences that require underlining of subjects and verbs; scrambled sentences to be sequenced in paragraph form; incomplete short stories that require students to write an appropriate ending. Finally, the increasingly particularized activities are applied in a "Product" (A-B) created by the student—a well-formed paragraph, a five-paragraph theme, or a short story containing the essential elements studied.

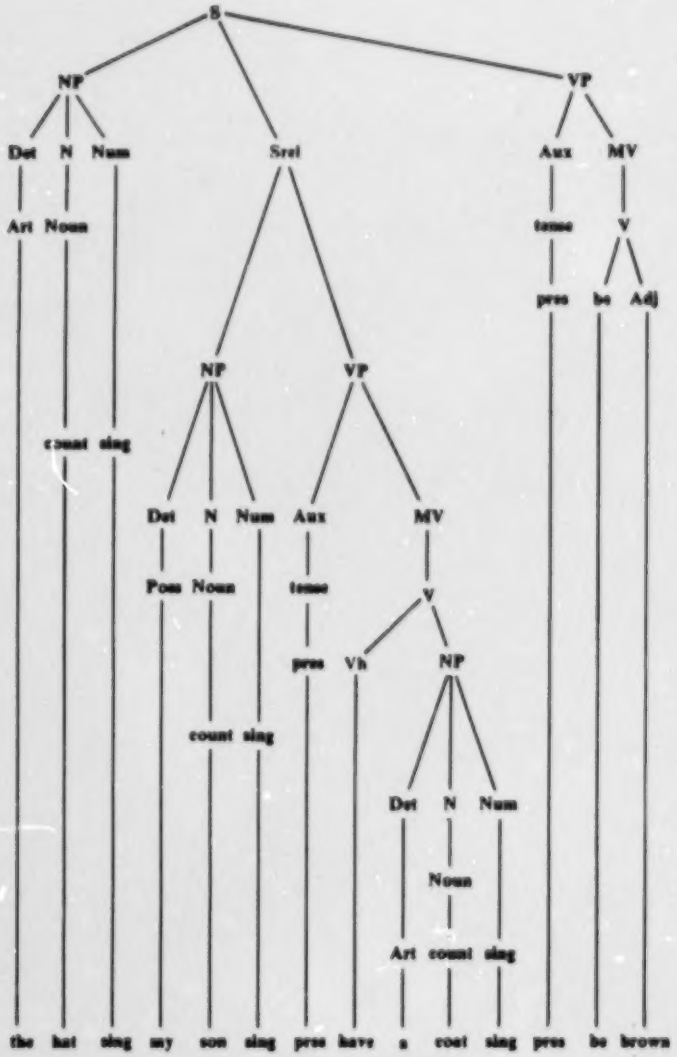
The movement from the abstraction to the models/examples and exercises is one of increasing specificity, usually involving subdividing broader concepts into component parts. The ultimate intention, though, is for the product to reflect the richness of the abstraction—or, at least, to embody the most important aspects of the models/examples. But of course, no written product, even from a professional writer, is a perfect realization of its type. The dimensions of the student's product are likely to be considerably narrower, with C-D being a more likely (and certainly acceptable) result of the content area approach.

When I began teaching in 1957, in a comprehensive high school, I and most of my colleagues used variations of the content area approach. The approach

is still dominant in grades K-12 in innumerable textbooks, handbooks, and curriculum guides. And teachers I have met from various parts of the country speak frequently in terms of the approach. It would be incorrect, though, to identify the Content Area Model with "traditional content." The model represents a *general approach* to teaching writing, not specific course content. Abstraction-to-product approaches can be, and often are, used in teaching relatively new ideas, such as transformational grammar and Christensen's (1966) sentence rhetoric. There is no concept, from Aristotelian logic to semiotic theory, that cannot be taught according to the Content Area Model. Take, for example, traditional sentence diagraming and transformational diagraming. A traditional diagram of the sentence, "My son's coat is brown," might look like this:



The same sentence, depicted in a transformational branching tree diagram, looks like this:



Whether using traditional or transformational diagrams, the teacher cannot escape teaching abstractions with the diagrams. In each case, the teacher must explain the diagraming method and provide definitions of essential terms like the possessive pronoun, linking verb, and predicate adjective in the traditional diagram, and nodes, embedding, and determiner in the transformational. (Admittedly, the transformational diagram is a more elegant description of the sentence; but as every graduate student in English knows, it is also far more abstract. If you find such things mind-boggling, try *A Primer of Transformational Grammar for Rank Beginners* by Suzette Elgin.)

The diagrams reveal a primary weakness of the content area approach. Teaching heady abstractions *about* writing is unlikely to produce good writing. I believe that English teachers know this through their collective experiences as well as from theory and research. Let me share a story from my own experience that has a parallel in the lives of many teachers. As a 10th-grade English teacher, I pretested my students yearly on the most basic information about language: parts of speech. Invariably, the students faltered somewhere between the definitions of pronoun and adverb, and I knew that my work was cut out for me. I went through the Grand Sequence in my own special and effective way, moving from parts of speech to phrases to clauses to sentences to paragraphs to essays. After all, how could students write essays if they did not know what a verb was? And it seemed to me that the logic of my approach—moving from smaller units to more complex ones—was working because at the end of the first semester, when the students started writing more, they seemed to do pretty well.

Then I noticed something strange. In the middle of the second semester, I tried to use the terminologies that had been the building blocks of my program earlier in the year—and the students had forgotten the definitions. They were writing regularly, improving as they went along; yet they seemed not to have at their disposal when we talked about writing most of the concepts that they had mastered. It did not occur to me at the time that I might have started the students writing during the first week of school instead of staging a forced march through grammatical terminology. The discussion, writing, and feedback of the second semester were what had worked, not the underlining of subjects once, verbs twice, labeling of prepositional phrases and adverb clauses, or taking notes on unity, coherence, and emphasis. My students did not begin unifying, cohering, or emphasizing until they had worthwhile things to talk and write about.

Nevertheless, I was satisfied that I was sending some fairly decent writers to Austin Wilson, my friend and colleague who taught English III. But when Wilson pretested the students on the most basic information about parts of speech, he concluded that Suhor had not taught them a thing. What they really needed was the Grand Sequence, taught in his own special and effective way. With a few differences related to teaching style, he covered the same arsenal of abstractions, switched to real writing afterwards, and sent some pretty decent writers to Miss Taggart, the senior English teacher.

You can guess what Miss Taggart thought about Wilson's students and his effectiveness as a teacher when she pretested them on essential knowledge of parts of speech. And so it goes.

The content area approach, whether focused on traditional or "modern" content, ultimately falters because it fails to pay enough attention to how students learn. In terms of Piagetian theory and research, most students do not have sufficient skill in manipulating abstractions to understand, digest, and apply dense concepts like the absolute phrase, the gerunds, and the participle.

In 1969, John Mellon did a review of 20th century research on the relationship between knowledge of formal grammar and writing skill. Steve Sherwin did a similar review, independently, in the same year. Usually, such reviews are highly inconclusive, allowing the researcher and the reader to take whatever meaning from the data that they like. For example, there are reading specialists who can quote a great deal of research in support of "phonics first" approaches to reading instruction. Others can counter with equally impressive studies showing that language experience approaches work. Still another group can cite research supporting linguistic approaches. The data are just that ambiguous and contradictory and subject to distortion by ideologists and peddlers of easy solutions.

The findings in the Mellon and Sherwin reviews, though, were remarkably consistent. Neither found a single study to support the notion that knowledge of definitions and rules will, in itself, improve student writing. True, the dozens of studies reviewed were vastly different in structure and focus, and many of them were wildly inept in design. But logically, a potpourri of studies lumped together in a historical review should paint a dappled picture. Their very diversity should skew the collective results so that no conclusions can be drawn. Such is the case with research reviews in most controversial areas, such as phonics versus language experience instruction in reading. But this is not the case with research on formal grammar and composition.

The message is *not* that teachers should avoid using any formal terminology in discussing writing. Clearly, though, a sustained program of definitional material is not warranted. Students do not learn how to write through abstract prescriptions any more than small children learn to talk through formalistic means. The content area approach is basically misdirected—at the structure of language, abstractly expressed—rather than at the student as a maker of language.

A final anecdote underlines the futility of dependence on the Content Area Model. Some sixth-graders who had been through the rigors of content area instruction in grammar for several years—textbooks begin labelling and defining in grades 2 and 3—were asked by Bruce Appelby to give their own definitions of grammar. Here's what they came up with in a class-composed poem.

Grrr—ammar
Grammar is where words pop in and out of your head like floating bubbles.
Grammar is knowing what to say when the preacher comes to dinner.
Grammar is when the teacher stands in front of the room and taps on the blackboard and says we must never say ain't.

Grammar is like coconut—I'm allergic to both.
Grammar is parts of speech that talk in the right way.
Grammar is when nouns are nouns and verbs are verbs until the time comes and nouns become verbs, and verbs become nouns and only the teacher can say when the time is coming.
Grammar is learning one way and speaking another.
Grammar is asking permission to wash your hands when it's not your hands you're worried about.
Grammar is wondering why it all matters to everyone but us.

Abstractions made easy

But what of simplified conceptual approaches adapted carefully to students' ability levels? Many teachers claim that certain highly structured content area devices—like teaching the five-paragraph theme and basic short-story structure—do in fact result in coherent writing. Let us look first at a variation on the five-paragraph theme. A bulletin from the Louisiana State Department of Education, *Models for Writing, K-12*, contains an extremely lucid treatment of teaching the essay through a simple format. The bulletin describes a "basic sixteen sentence pattern essay" that falls into four paragraphs of four sentences each. The aim is to provide the student with "an easily recognizable form which he/she can imitate." Included are a visual model, teaching instructions, and credible testimony that the methods have been used "extremely effectively with grades 7-12." Several examples of the four-paragraph/16-sentence pattern essay are given, among them: "The Need for Exercise."

1. If given the opportunity, people have always endangered their health by eating too much and exercising too little. 2. The ancient Romans indulged themselves with large banquets. 3. Today many Americans have heart attacks because they are overweight and under exercised. 4. For good health every adult should follow a daily plan of exercise.

5. Many doctors recommend jogging as a particularly effective form of exercise. 6. Heart patients jog because they need bodily movement which will strengthen the heart. 7. Jogging also builds leg muscles. 8. It can help a person lose extra pounds.

9. Another effective form of exercise is swimming. 10. It stretches arm and leg muscles. 11. It even reduces bulging waistlines. 12. Some swimmers say that water sports improve a person's coordination.

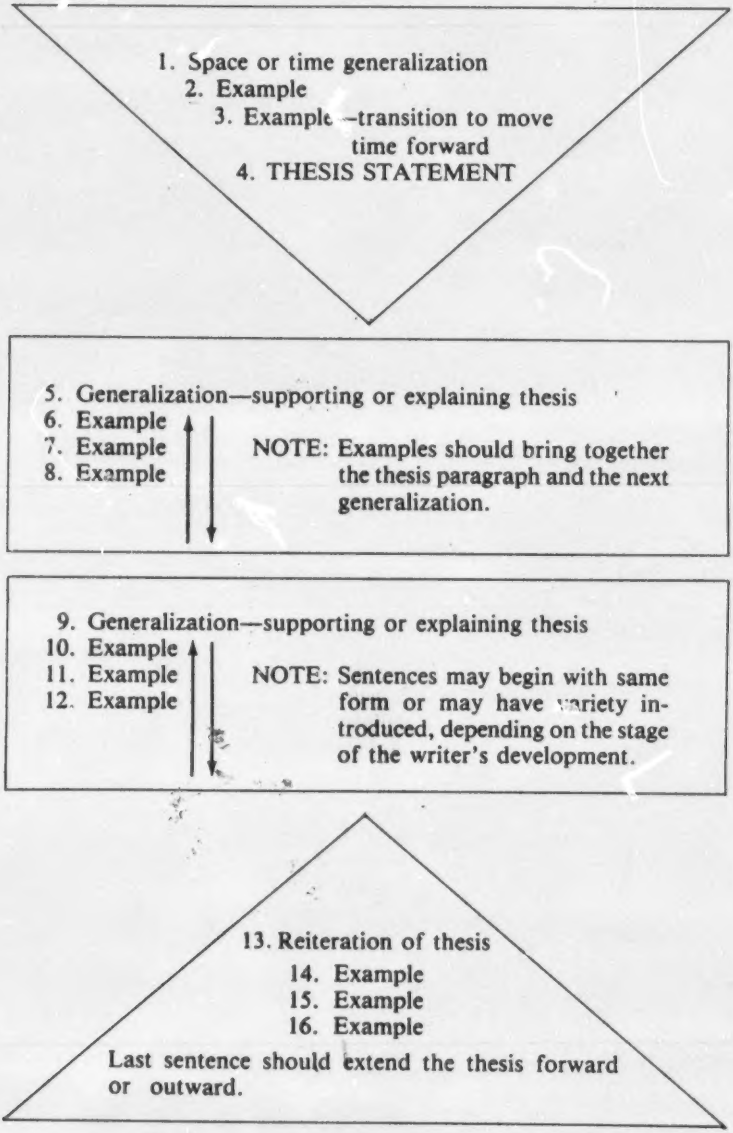
13. Because many Americans work in offices, they neglect the exercise necessary for being in good physical condition. 14. As people become more concerned with their physical well-being, jogging and swimming will be joined by other forms of strenuous movement. 15. Some physical therapists predict a boom in the number of health spas and exercise clinics in the next few years. 16. Some day even grandmothers may be running the four minute mile!

The bulletin acknowledges that the approach is limiting and suggests that students who master the form be permitted to move quickly to more complex writing. Students with skill in organization, the bulletin says, "would not benefit greatly from detailed attention to this model." The caveats are well taken. It would be extremely depressing to think that producing vacuous, formulaic essays is an important goal of the writing program. Yet I confess that I taught essay-by-formula for several years in a comprehensive school. And I was successful in getting students to fill in numerous structural and rhetorical blanks that added up to well-organized trivialities. I went on to other things, of course; but the simplified, abstraction-to-product approach did give many students their first feeling of success in essay writing.

So I won a limited victory over compositional chaos. But those rickety little essays never told me whether or not my students could express themselves with honesty, courage, or even any basic feeling on a given topic. Genuine self-expression and communication emerged in class discussion, in one-to-one conferences, and in other writing, not in the essays written according to simple prescriptions.

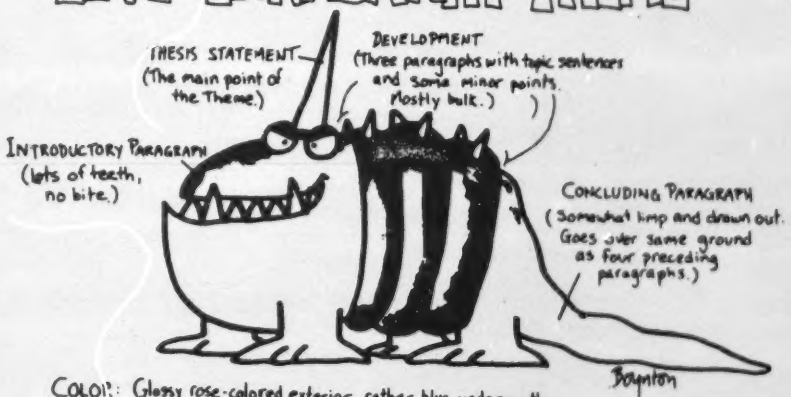
I present below the visual model of the four-paragraph/16-sentence theme. Following that is a satirical comment on the five-paragraph theme from Boynton and Cook.

NUMBER ALL SENTENCES.
UNDERLINE THE GENERALIZATION IN EACH PARAGRAPH ONCE.
UNDERLINE THE THESIS STATEMENT (4) TWICE.


1. Space or time generalization
2. Example
3. Example –transition to move time forward
4. THESIS STATEMENT
5. Generalization—supporting or explaining thesis
6. Example
7. Example
8. Example
NOTE: Examples should bring together the thesis paragraph and the next generalization.
9. Generalization—supporting or explaining thesis
10. Example
11. Example
12. Example
NOTE: Sentences may begin with same form or may have variety introduced, depending on the stage of the writer's development.
13. Reiteration of thesis
14. Example
15. Example
16. Example
Last sentence should extend the thesis forward or outward.

Boynton/Cook, Publishers PRESENT

The FIVE-PARAGRAPH THEME


THESIS STATEMENT
(The main point of the Theme.)
DEVELOPMENT
(Three paragraphs with topic sentences and some minor points. Mostly bulk.)
INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH
(lots of teeth, no bite.)
CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH
(Somewhat limp and drawn out. Goes over same ground as four preceding paragraphs.)
Boynton

COLOR: Glossy rose-colored exterior, rather blue underneath. Occasional theme has a blend, resulting in purple passages.

In the real world of classroom events, one tends to get what one asks for. Formalistic teaching will yield formalistic results. An example from a short story unit, discovered by Yetta Goodman of the University of Arizona, illustrates this principle. After studying definitions and models of the basic elements in a narrative, fifth-graders were asked to write an original story. A student named Rachel apparently learned the lesson a little too well.

The Cat and the Rat

by Rachel

Once upon a time, there was an old house. There was nothing in the house but an old cat. This old cat was a antagonist. He hated mice he wontent let mice near the house. So one little mice came by the house, this mice was a protagonist. This takes place in California. The cat was asleep on some covers in the kitchen so the mouse was hungree so he decided to go see what was kitchen to eat. He jumped on the table then on the counter. The mice was eaten some old beans all of the sudden the cat woke up and saw that there was a mice in the house. So the cat and the mice had a climax and guess who won the mice did. And the mice lived in the old house all by himself. RESOLUTION.

Strengths of the Content Area Approach

There are some benefits of the Content Area Model. First, many traditional teachers reverse the first two elements in the model, starting out with models and examples. Through Socratic questioning, the students come to understand the abstract qualities underlying the works under study. For example, students might be assigned simple interior monologues like Dorothy Parker's "The Waltz" and Milton Kaplan's "Feeling Like Spring," or more complex stream-of-consciousness stories like E.B. White's "The Door." In discussing how these works differ from other short stories they have read, students arrive at concepts of the interior monologue technique and stream-of-consciousness; then they attempt original writings. This analytical/discursive method was the basis for a sketch called, "Creative Writing," written by Fred Z., a bright 10th-grader.

Well, I guess I'd better get with it and begin this lousy creative writing assignment. I hate creating. It bugs me.

Say, man, I sure have a dirty room. And look at this desk! Ugh! What a mess!

Well, what shall I write my literary masterpiece about? I could make it a satire. What about? Hmmm. Oh! I could make it satirical of foreign aid. Say, cool. Like maybe "Animal Farm Revisited." No, I don't think that would work very well. Too complicated.

Man, the light from that lamp is bright. There, that's better.

I hate English.

This chair is uncomfortable. Drat it! Why can't my sister leave things as they are—comfortable. Always taking my chair and putting this one here. Lousy pack rat.

Oh, yeah, I better get back to work or I won't get this lousy job done. I hate creative writing, or any other thing that I have to think about. Lousy school. Come on, man, concentrate! Think! Think!

What about? Oh, yes, creative writing. Well, let's see. I could write about a boy who gets a weird type of toy, and all his friends ridicule him for being different. Then he tells them that he doesn't want to be like everybody else. But he doesn't really believe what he's saying. Then someone or something could make him see the light, and he suddenly believes what he has been saying. No! No! Much too corny. I've read fairy tales better than that.

Boy, that map on my wall is out of proportion. Look at the size of Greenland to Australia. Stupid map!

Pesky train whistle. Every night, every night. Say, I'll bet my trains are in a mess now. Man, I bet the houses are melted from the heat. Lousy attic. Why couldn't we have a basement or something? Grimy map.

Oh, speaking of attics, I'd better get mine working. Think! How corny can you get?

Stupid attic. Stupid school. Stupid! Aw, come on and get your mind working. Oil it, or something.

Oil it. Like man, I bet my Johnson needs oil in the gear box. Have to see about it.

Oh, man, I'm going to give up trying to hold a conscious thought.

Conscious. Like cool! Yes, I could do one of those stream-of-consciousness type stories like the one in class. But how? Hmmm . . . . Oh, what a weird thought forming! Yes, I could start it like this:

"Well, I guess I'd better get with it and begin this lousy creative writing assignment. I hate creating. It bugs me . . . . "

As the example suggests, using models of literary types as the basis for student discussions is one of the strongest elements in content area instruction. Models are not sufficient for teaching composition, of course— but they are probably necessary. Minimally, group discussion of others' work involves training in thinking skills and oral communication. I suspect that actual carryover from discussion to writing depends on a number of factors— the quality of the discussion (in terms of the students' interests, participation, and skill in developing points logically); the conscious attention given to compositional aspects of the model (style, logical structure, methods of achieving cohesion); note-taking skills; and the accessibility of the writers to the students.

The test of accessibility is whether or not students, after discussing the

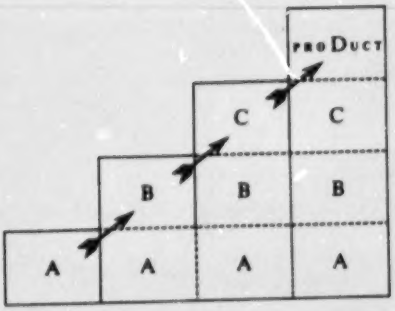
writer's skills and flaws, believe that they can "go and do likewise." Conventional textbooks were often packed with inaccessible models from Thoreau, Faulkner, O. Henry James. In recent years, textbook writers have taken the cue from good teachers who go to the ditto machine with carefully selected models written by students or drawn from contemporary professional writers.

The greatest flaw in using writing models is that we expect too much of them. No amount of discussion of others' writings will substitute for the actual experience of writing. We have greatly overestimated the benefits of analysis of models. As Richard Barbieri of Milton Academy has said, "You cannot infer a pig from a sausage."

The content area approach has another virtue: It is often quicker than other approaches. A content focus is well-suited to teaching things that do not warrant a great deal of time, such as reviews of literary or rhetorical terms used earlier in the year. Metric forms in poetry, if taught at all, are probably taught less painfully through definitional methods that allow students to move quickly into writing original haikus or limericks. Gifted students can often interiorize abstract and formalistic guidelines rapidly, opening the way for in-depth treatment of more sophisticated aspects of writing. During my years of teaching in a public school for gifted students, I noticed that teachers in many subject areas brushed aside arbitrary "required" topics quickly by asking students simply to read/listen and apply. The teacher of gifted students also knows that they often approach formulaic assignments playfully, satirizing the assignment even as they carry it out. Fred Z's "Creative Writing" sketch is one example. Another student executed a "How to . . . " assignment by writing a mock-serious guide on using the telephone book. Another, late in submitting a cause-effect paper, wrote a wildly Gothic explanation of his tardiness.

Finally, it is hard to counter the argument that *some* rigid, formulaic writing is entrenched in both the educational system and society for the forseeable future. Maybe the five-paragraph theme, the self-advertising clincher sentence, and the ability to cultivate a certain amount of jargon are aspects of communicative competency—survival skills in the context of the educational system and society at large. RESOLUTION.

THE MASTERY MODEL



The Mastery Model for teaching composition is a visual interpretation of Benjamin Bloom's ideas. The step-by-step image in the model is consistent with Bloom's belief that much school learning can be broken down into component parts, with each segment of a learning sequence carefully built upon the previous one. In a strict mastery sequence on proper use of the question mark, for example, Step A might make a distinction between questions and declarations, with a short exercise to be completed as a condition of proceeding to Step B. That step might involve understanding differences between questions and queries in the form of statements ("I wonder whether . . . "); and Step C might describe tag-end questions, which appear at the ends of statements (" . . . , don't they?"). Brief exercises at the end of Step B and C would demonstrate partial mastery. The final step, implicitly or explicitly embracing all the others might ask the student to distinguish questions from nonquestions in a series of unpunctuated sentences; to label regular questions from nonquestions in a series of unpunctuated sentences; to label regular questions, tag-end questions, and query-statements; and to produce original, end-punctuated sentences that exemplify the concepts included in Steps A-C. Similar mastery sequences could be developed for other punctuation marks and for many (but not all) composition concepts and activities.

Like content area instruction, mastery learning can and often does move from abstraction to practice. And many teachers who use the content area approach are careful to arrange instruction units in a logical manner, as in the phrase/clause/sentence/paragraph/essay sequence described earlier. But mastery instruction is far more rigorous in its specification of objectives and sequencing of component parts. Moreover, the Mastery Model builds in

evaluation at each important step, and it always allows for varying rates of progress among students.

Mastery learning is consistent with three important influences on education: Skinner's behaviorist psychology; Mager's specification of learning objectives; and the use of programed materials in textbooks, computers, and other instructional materials. The idea of behavioral objectives, first popularized in the 1960's, reflects a Skinnerian view of learning, namely, learning seen as the systematic inducement of observable behaviors. The behaviorists' emphasis on that which is observable and measurable was in part a legitimate reaction to fuzzy, overgeneralized traditional goals, such as "appreciation of great literature" and "ability to write with verve and imagination."

The behaviorist would argue that such vague goals must be recast in ways that are useful to the teacher, the learner, and the overseeing education agencies. Hence, a mastery-based learning sequence on "Clear Sentences" would provide several steps for distinguishing clear sentences from those with various kinds of ambiguity (improper modification, faulty pronoun reference, etc.). The abstract notion of "clarity" would thereby be "operationalized" in the materials, which specify the kinds of ambiguity to be avoided and the kinds of clarity to be sought.

Programed materials can be (and often have been) put together in loose, nonmastery sequences, but they are especially adaptable to mastery learning. Textbooks can be carefully programed, as in Blumenthal's *English 2200*, *English 2600*, and *English 3200* series. But mastery-based programed materials are most suited to teaching machines, especially computerized instruction units. The definition of "teaching machine" in the AECT (Association for Educational Communication and Technology) *A Glossary of Terms* (1979) underlines the strong relationships among machinery, programed instruction, and behaviorist theory.

> **Teaching machine (programed instruction)**
>
> A device which presents programed materials and provides for reinforcement. Such devices usually include: storage for programed materials (ranging from printed pages to a roll of paper or a computerized information bank); a display panel for items (ranging from a written paragraph to a visual projection screen); a student response device (which may be a space in which to write, buttons to push or a typewriter keyboard); and a feedback mechanism from which the student determines the correctness of the response (ranging from a page in a book to an answer revealed by a sliding door or a computerized print-out). Teaching machines may also record student responses permanently and some select subsequent steps on the basis of the student's response. (p. 185)

Programed materials on computers can permit a high degree of individualization insofar as students with different problems in mastering a

skill can be taken along different "branches" that deal with their particular problems. Computer programs allow students to advance at their own rate, since a one-on-one relationship exists between the student and the computer. Many materials on grammar and punctuation are already on the courseware market and in use in PLATO and other systems.

The Mastery Model is appealing because it looks so orderly and reasonable—and even "innovative," given the emergence of computers as a sign of the future in schools. Mastery-based programs look good to the PTA, the education reporter for the local gazette, and legislators who want desperately to be assured that something is happening in the schools. Surely, they reason, such a program cannot fail to promote learning. Doesn't mastery start from the beginning with "entry behaviors" then take students logically—and on an individualized basis—through the steps that lead to a product? Further, mastery is demonstrated during the various steps in the process and at the end point as well. Here, at last, is proof that learning is taking place in the schools.

Flaws in the mastery approach

The apparent common-sense benefits of mastery learning ultimately do not square either with research or with the insights of practicing teachers. Benjamin Bloom, the father of mastery learning, points out in *Human Characteristics and School Learning* (1976) that mastery works best in subject areas that can be "chopped up" into neat sequences. Most mastery research has been in teaching the sciences, and applications have been mainly in subject areas that lend themselves to the step-by-step approach. In the Army, I learned most things by a mastery method, from disassembling, cleaning, and reassembling a rifle to cleaning mess trays by-the-numbers. But on maneuvers, we were led through situations that called for hypothesis-making, improvisation, and quick intuitive action—none of which could be "mastered" through mastery.

Bloom acknowledges that certain cognitive skills are learned in an erratic manner, according to developmental patterns that are inconsistent with the mastery design. He points out that further work is needed in "reasoning processes, language development, and writing competence . . . before one can clearly identify and measure . . . generalized entry behaviors" as a basis for mastery learning (p. 51). Every parent knows that Bloom is right. Language acquisition in young children—an incredibly complex process in which most grammatical structures in English are learned by age 6—occurs in ways that bear no resemblance to the rigidities of mastery learning. Moreover, research in composing processes in children and adults suggests that writing involves a complicated set of interrelated activities, probably best taught initially through more flexible methods.

Like the Content Area Model, the Mastery Model is subject to earnest misapplication based on a belief in logical organization of teaching materials. Yes, it is "logical" to segment the composition program, starting with a study of words and proceeding to the study of sentences, phrases, clauses,

and so on. But this logical organization of *materials* does not mean that *students* interiorize the sequence and can actually use such instruction to write more effectively. In other words, the psychology of the learner, not presuppositions about the structure of the discipline or a sequential mode of instruction, should be considered first in developing a composition program.

Mastery learning is truly "practical" only in certain areas of English instruction. If you think of class discussion or small-group work as an important preparation for writing, you cannot subscribe to a Mastery Model of composition teaching, because the dynamic of discussion cannot be segmented into distinct steps. But if you want to teach proper use of quotation marks, mastery materials can be helpful. In fact, mastery-based programed materials on computer can provide good support for many aspects of teaching mechanics in a composition program. I can even imagine, say, a computerized mastery sequence based on Kenneth Pike's strategies for exploring a topic. But the present state of the art is that mastery learning can guarantee little more than one-shot mastery of a limited set of skills, often to the systematic exclusion of more global skills. My inability to produce student writing samples resulting from the Mastery Model is based on the simple fact that mastery instruction yields small parts, not wholes. I have never heard a teacher claim that any student essay was written in connection with a strict Mastery Model lesson.

Allan Glatthorn's (1980) National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) book, *A Guide for Developing an English Curriculum for the Eighties,* does champion a mastery curriculum in English. But Glatthorn says that the mastery curriculum's "emphasis on specific objectives, frequent assessment, and error remediation makes it inappropriate for all organic learning and for any integrated thematic units which would emphasize discovery and inductive learning" (p. 27). He speaks of (but does not delineate) an entire nonmastery "organic curriculum" that deals with oral language competence, affective learning, and other components of English study.

Glatthorn's fine instincts as a teacher usually prevail over his dubious dichotomy of a mastery and organic curriculum. To his credit, he acknowledges that his is not a rigid mastery program in Bloom's sense. He sometimes deviates radically from mastery theory (as in his excellent suggestions for warmup activities for composition). But I fear that Glatthorn's quasi-mastery program will give mastery instruction in English an undeserved good name. And at its worst, Glatthorn's program supports the narrowness of the Mastery Model's behaviorist bias and its tendency to whittle down English curricula to the dimensions of the mastery approach. (Witness, for example, Glatthorn's idea that the mastery curriculum, not the organic curriculum, should determine the selection of textbooks.)

There are political implications of mastery learning to consider. Teachers should know that many administrators see mastery materials—in the forms of individualized learning packets, programed materials, and computer courseware—as "teacher-proof." Some of the worst fears about the teacher's diminishing power to determine everyday programs and practices might be realized through imposing rigid mastery materials. Curriculum developers

and school administrators live in a politically charged climate. They must deal with public demands for concrete information (read: test results) about student learning, and with legislatively mandated competency programs. Even though no hard research exists to show that writing can be taught effectively through mastery techniques, administrators might find it expedient to invoke mastery as an ordered, sequential, self-proving method for teaching everything. Certainly, mastery is easier to explain to the public than, say, the rationale for teaching composition in accordance with the developmental learning patterns of the child.

Variations on mastery curricula in English or reading have already been introduced in numerous school systems, including Chicago, Louisville, New Orleans, and Salt Lake City. In one city, I asked several English teachers how they felt about the program. Their views ranged from enthusiastic endorsement to bitter complaints about cynicism and blindness at the central office. One English department head claimed that the program gave a unity to the English curriculum in her school for the first time. I knew from direct observation that this teacher conducts good classroom discussions and has a varied writing program. So I asked how she personally reconciled the prescribed program with the use of journals, small-group discussions, and other things that she does so well. Her answer was that there is a point at which she simply closes the door and teaches, doing what she believes is good for students. I, for one, am thankful that mastery programs are not proof against this teacher's skills.

If mastery models are imposed on English programs in composition, I see at least four results: Teachers who now teach virtually no composition at all will be forced to make a show of it, at least; many teachers will be either sufficiently impressed or intimidated by the approach and will stop looking for other ways of teaching writing; many will carry out the program minimally but will make time for other things; and finally, a few will actively oppose the program and become, in effect, agents for further curriculum change.

THE WRITING PROCESS MODEL

	PRE-WRITING +	DRAFTING +	REVISING = PRODUCT	
PURPOSE	*THINKING*—brainstorming, refining organizing ideas	With benefit of previous thought and talk	With *FEEDBACK*—peer reaction, teacher reaction, self-evaluation; includes *proofreading*	AUDIENCE
PURPOSE	*DISCUSSION*— with peers and teachers			AUDIENCE
PURPOSE	*READING AND DISCUSSING*—use of models			AUDIENCE

This Writing Process Model is a synthesis of ideas from Graves, Britton, Stanford, and others. The elements of purpose and audience permeate the model. Even though the process is student-centered, drawing on experiences and ideas of students, all activities relate to the purpose of an assignment—e.g., to create an essay of comparison and contrast. A sense of audience also permeates the model. Students are not writing solely for the teacher. Rather, at numerous points, they share ideas and react to each other's writing, and their final product is intended to be read by someone besides the teacher.

Prewriting

The prewriting stage is an important feature of the model. Prewriting activities can include teaching appropriate *thinking skills*. A two-step brainstorming/language game involving comparison and contrast might include these questions placed on the chalkboard:

How is a _____ like a _____?

How are they different?

In the first step, the teacher can provide five to eight pairs of nouns, beginning perhaps with simple word pairs (like oak tree, rabbit; tricycle, jet plane), then going on to more complex ones (including some with potential for humor—like zoo, schoolyard; TV advertisement, soap opera) and others of a more abstract nature (like jogging, studying; friendship, love). Students' interests and level of sophistication should be considered in selecting word pairs. As in all brainstorming, the emphasis should be on quick-paced response without hard evaluation of the ideas presented.

In the second step, the teacher can ask each student to write on a slip of paper a single noun—anything from "hamburger" to "generosity." The slips are folded and put into a grab-bag, and a volunteer randomly chooses any two slips. The questions on the blackboard are then applied to the selected pairs. Students are encouraged to use imagination so that odd pairings like "circus" and "sausage pizza" will result in some ingenious, even bizarre, comparisons and contrasts.

From the warmup games, the students move to *discussion* of topics that interest them—again, with comparisons and contrasts built into the topics. The teacher might lead the discussion to provide a model of good interactive discussion (described in Excursion I, "Talk in the Classroom," in a later section). Students who are skilled in discussion might go directly into small groups according to topics of common interest. In any case, students should be encouraged to make notes on key ideas in the discussions. Topics for discussion might be comparison/contrast of two cities, television shows, football teams, popular singers, cars, newspaper ads, and so on. Academic topics

may also be considered. Joyce Kilmer's "Trees" can be compared to Edward Field's excellent modern poem of the same name; D.H. Lawrence and Emily Dickinson both wrote poems about bats; and so on.

Reading and discussing *model essays* will give students a chance to examine how others have organized comparisons and contrasts in written forms. As noted in the section on content area instruction, accessibility is important. Cicero compared the contributions of the soldier to those of the statesman. Montaigne compared personal experience with testimony and institutional wisdom. Lamb compared two kinds of intellect—the "Caledonian" or compulsively orderly thinker and the "anti-Caledonian" or intuitive thinker. Yet, these essays would, at best, convince most students of Cicero's, Montaigne's, and Lamb's brilliance without developing confidence in their own potential for producing insightful comparisons. The "Yes/Queen" essay below, written by Greg S., a high school senior, though not a classic, is a good model, briskly written. It can help students to get a feeling for how to organize comparisons and a conviction that the process is within their range of capabilities.

Two rock groups of British origin, Yes and Queen, have won popularity among young audiences everywhere, each achieving a recognizable style in the music they produce. Both bands have attained the aura of royalty typical of superstars in the world of rock. But despite surface similarities, Yes and Queen are two different bands.

Queen can be looked upon as rock conservatives, sticking to the instrumental basics (piano, bass, guitar, drums) and getting novelty by throwing in outrageous vocalizations or varied musical structures (blues, ragtime, opera, gospel). These factors alone have given Queen a style hard to duplicate. Yes is musically liberal, using the latest equipment and basing their overlapping melodies on classical music. The group experiments more with instrumentation than Queen does, and the result is a more convincing style.

Vocalists are usually the focus of attention in a rock bands and this is true of Queen and Yes. Jon Anderson, the lead vocalist for Yes, contributes heavily to the band's popularity, writing nearly all of the lyrics and a majority of the melodies. He has a wide vocal range, sticking mostly to his falsetto, which is very well controlled—a quality that is generally lacking in rock vocalists.

Freddie Mercury, lead vocalist and pianist for Queen, is one of the band members most responsible for the group's popularity. Mercury wrote "Killer Queen" (their first hit) and "Bohemian Rhapsody," which gained them national popularity in 1975. Like Jon Anderson, he has a wide vocal range, and he brings together a variety of influences with unusual perception.

Yes's tendency to experiment makes their instrumental work more interesting. Keyboard player Rick Wakeman has a menagerie of keyboards and synthesizers that he plays very effectively. Screams and sirens, bombs and choirs, feedback and euphoria are all at his fingertips as he works

his synthesizers. Like the rest of Yes, his runs are classically oriented, so he fits right in with the group's musical blueprint.

Queen's elemental style rarely calls for synthesizers, but lead guitarist Brian May produces an adequate synthesis of sounds with his guitar. Although May has a definite rock orientation, he can create reproductions of trumpets, flutes, and flowing harmonies that one would believe came from a synthesizer. Yes guitarist Steve Howe produces a variety of guitar noises also, but he is best at throwing out dashes of linking guitar runs, intense solos in alternating patterns, and bright, classically influenced melodies.

Chris Squire, bass guitarist for Yes, is undoubtedly one of the most gifted bass players in rock. He is free-styled yet very disciplined, and his timing is immaculate. He executes syncopated, bouncing riffs that complement Yes's unique and complex rhythms. John Deacon of Queen, Squire's bass-playing counterpart, is noticeably rock-based in style. Though his rhythms are simpler than Squire's, his timing and heavy rock sound are appropriate for the tunes that Queen grinds out.

Roger Taylor, the drummer for Queen, also supports their rock n' roll approach. He has no outstanding qualities as a rock drummer, other than that he is, in fact, a good rock drummer. He keeps a solid, driving beat and can do effective fill-ins from one phrase to another. Alan White, Yes's drummer, is more flexible, perhaps once again because the group's music permits him greater freedom. He uses not only conventional drums but also drum synthesizers, gongs, chimes, vibraphones, crotales—the widest variety of percussive sounds available.

Because of their landmark achievements in developing rock, it is impossible to state that Queen is better than Yes or that Yes is better than Queen. Each group's style is distinctive, and you could not rate one against the other any more than you could rate the Eiffel Tower against the Egyptian pyramids. I personally enjoy both of them to the point of fanaticism, and I can foresee new musical ideas emerging from the better qualities of both bands.

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Students should be invited to react to the substance of the essay, if they wish. The author's approaches to comparison/contrast can be discussed afterwards. That discussion could include form-related questions like:

- In the first paragraph, what similarities between the two bands were mentioned?
- What differences were pointed out in the second paragraph?

- Going through the rest of the essay, identify the points that the writer selected for comparison and contrast. Tell whether the writer offered adequate examples, descriptions, or comments to back up his comparisons and contrasts.

- Find key words in the essay that link ideas for making comparisons (*also*, *similarly*, *like*, etc.) and contrasts (*but*, *although*, *yet*, etc.).

Drafting; feedback for revision

With good prewriting preparation, students should be ready to write the first draft of their own comparison/contrast essays. They can choose from topics already discussed in class or select another topic. This draft is not seen as the culminating activity, or as a test of skills and understandings from prewriting sessions, or even necessarily as a solo flight. For some students, further discussion with the teacher or with other students about potential topics and approaches might be useful before beginning the draft.

Since students are encouraged to see the draft as an initial attempt rather than a magnum opus (the first draft might in fact resemble Ken Macrorie's "free writing" or James Britton's "expressive writing"), there is less anxiety here than in traditional do-or-die writing situations. Students know that there will be refinement and revision based on feedback from the teacher, the entire class, or small-student groups.

The three most common kinds of teacher feedback are individual *written commentary*, *conferencing*, and *writing centers*. Historically, written commentaries from the teacher have been the main source of feedback; but as students write more frequently, teachers are finding it virtually impossible to respond in writing to every student paper. NCTE's statement on class size points out that

> **the language arts teacher must have a class size and student load that allow time to meet school and classroom responsibilities and to provide attention to individual student needs. For a teacher load of 100 students, a minimum of 20 minutes per week per student for the evaluation of writing involves 33.3 hours—the equivalent of four working days—in addition to the time required for the preparation and teaching of the other language arts skills.**

Yet some written comments are essential. They establish rapport while offering substantive advice to the student, and they strengthen the image of the teacher as one who communicates through writing. Here, for example, is the response to an early draft of Greg S.'s "Yes/Queen" paper.

You're off to a good start. Some specifics for consideration in your next draft: I like your contrast of Yes and Queen as "liberal" and "conservative," respectively. Could you explain that more fully in terms of their basic styles?

Your treatment of the vocalists is interesting but scattered. You're treating Anderson in paragraph 2, then taking up Mercury in paragraph 5. Why not get the comparisons side by side? Most of your comparisons would be sharper, I think, if you paired them up more clearly and used more connectives as "glue."

The sentence that begins "Screams and sirens" has great energy, as do most of your sentences.

As teachers require more writing, the need for a less time-consuming response increases. Student-teacher conferencing during class time appears to be growing as a method for teacher feedback. In the conference, the teacher simply converses with the student about strong and weak points in the draft and suggests strategies for improvement. Proofreading concerns—correction of spelling and mechanics—are normally postponed until later.

Some schools have established writing centers where students can meet with a teacher-conferencer at different times of the day for help in developing an assignment. For a good writing center design, see the article by Luban et al. in the November 1978 *English Journal*.

Peer feedback—students giving each other advice on how to improve their writing—was once known as "cheating." It is not that at all, of course. Nor is it just a way of dealing with the time constraints inherent in teacher feedback. The fact is that students attend to each other's comments very carefully. And when teachers train students to react intelligently to each other's work, they are training students in critical thinking, discussion skills, and tolerance of others' ideas and feelings.

In the section on prewriting, I noted that good whole-class discussion should precede small-group work. The same applies to peer feedback. Students need to observe pertinent, sensitive discussion of their peer's writing before they interact in small groups. Excursion 1, "Talk in the Classroom," will go into more detail about both class discussion and ways of organizing small groups. At this point, I would like to recommend one excellent resource on teacher evaluation, peer evaluation, and small-group work—NCTE's *How to Handle the Paper Load* (edited by Gene Stanford and the NCTE Committee on Classroom Practices). I would also like to offer five specific ideas for small-group evaluation of early drafts.

- Circulate a list of discussion points to be raised in each group. These points should deal with the most important characteristics—"primary traits," if you will—of the kind of composition assigned.

- As an alternative to discussion points, circulate a checklist of things to look for in each paper. Again, the checklist should not be a single, overgeneralized list of broad compositional qualities; it should focus on important aspects of the particular assignment.

- Use other discussion-inducing techniques with students who are either inexperienced with discussion or inclined to use peer feedback sessions as a display of intolerance or braggadocio. For example, the "PSQ Method" used in the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Public Schools calls for a positive statement (P) first; a suggestion (S) for improvement second; and a question (Q) to the author third.

- Suggest different strategies for working within groups. One group might prefer to have each paper read aloud by the author, while another might wish to have each paper passed around and read silently before group discussion begins.

- In the initial peer feedback session on a given assignment, encourage students to overlook mechanical aspects of the papers so that they can focus on substantive aspects. But if poor spelling or mechanics render parts of the paper virtually unintelligible, this should be called to the attention of the student writer.

Proofreading

Specifically focusing on *proofreading* for accurate spelling, punctuation, Standard English usage, and other aspects can await later revisions. The teacher has long-range responsibility for diagnosing spelling, mechanics, and usage needs of the class as a whole and of individual students. Problems observed in most students' papers over a period of time might be met head-on with the entire class through appropriate exercises. But as suggested earlier, an all-out attack on a broad range of principles of mechanics and usage each year is unwarranted. In other words, handbooks on grammar and punctuation should never be used as textbooks. Rather, a handbook is a *resource* for such actual problems as the teacher discovers in student writing.

When students' errors are at a low level of abstraction—e.g., lack of commas for items in a series—the Content Area Model of abstraction-to-product might best be employed. When an error is more sophisticated—e.g., lack of commas around nonrestrictive adjective clauses—most students will respond more readily to sentence combining exercises that involve both manipulation of syntax and appropriate punctuation. *Sentence combining exercises can be created for almost all syntactic structures and the conventions of punctuation that go with them.* (See existing materials by Combs, O'Hare, and McHugh noted in the Reference section.)

Special effort should be made to individualize instruction in mechanics and usage. Some students in a ninth-grade class might have problems with almost all uses of the comma. Others might need help only with, say, com-

mas in introductory adverb clauses and restrictive/nonrestrictive materials. Conferencing can help straighten out many problems on an individual basis. Exercises, whether in handbooks or computers, are important resources for individualization.

Research in teaching conventions of Edited American English is soft. But we do know from National Assessment data that students are generally better at mechanics and spelling than they are at more central compositional skills, like producing clear, well-connected discourse. This is ironic, since the business community has traditionally expressed worry about errors in spelling, mechanics, and usage. A Wisconsin study, for example, showed that business people valued correct spelling and other cosmetic aspects of writing above organization of ideas. Research also suggests that excessive attention to minutiae in feedback promotes an exaggerated sense of the importance of mechanics and creates a fear of writing, which limits the individual's chances of success both in school and in career choices.

It is in the final *product*, ready for delivery to the audience, that the students should seek the most complete realization of mechanical "perfection"—or more realistically, mechanical *excellence* in writing. The product has been thought through, talked through, and shaped carefully in successive drafts, tailored to a particular audience. The audience is the student's peers when the product is placed in a class or school anthology; displayed on a bulletin board; submitted to a school newspaper; or read to another class. The audience might be adults, receiving letters to the editor, character sketches or interviews (given to the subject of the sketch or interview), or queries directed to industries, government agencies, or public officials.

Students are gratified to learn that products developed through the Writing Process Model are not in fact the end of communication. People *respond* to audience-oriented writing, just as they do to the purposeful writing that adults carry out in the real world.

THE PROCESS MODEL AND OTHER MODELS—COMPARISONS

The Writing Process Model described is likely to seem overinflated to some teachers and overstructured to others. Despite considerable hoopla over its innovative nature, the model is recognizable as a rearrangement of good things that have been going on for a long time. The model's strength probably lies in its selection and development of some of the most effective elements in the traditional repertoire.

Certainly, the idea that purpose should underly writing activities is not a new one. Purpose is a fetish in the Mastery Model and a major element in the Content Area Model, being immediately linked with the product in those models.

The idea of audience, though important in classical rhetoric, was neglected in content area instruction and is practically invisible in mastery instruction. Owing largely to James Britton's research, the idea of real audiences has

been revived as a powerful motivator of student writing. Britton found that students seldom write for audiences other than the teacher, and that the teacher's role is characteristically not that of helper and guide, but of tester and error-finder. The new emphasis on real audiences is supported obliquely by research in writing apprehension and by 1970 National Assessment tests. Both sources suggest that students and adults who write for testers and wielders of red pencils often end up not wanting to write at all.

Prewriting is not a new idea. Good teachers have always invited students to discuss their experiences and analyze sample essays in preparation for writing. But in recent research by Arthur Applebee (1981), only a small proportion of teachers were actually found to engage students in prewriting activities. Prewriting is built into the process model—although it excludes content area prewriting techniques like the outline, emphasizing instead organization of notes taken during discussion. The process model adds new dimensions to prewriting, such as language games that relate to pertinent thought processes, and it links these games to subsequent discussion and writing. (See Reference section, *Designing and Sequencing Prewriting Activities* by Larry Johannessen, et al.) Drafting and revising have been around for centuries. But again, the concepts are refined in the Writing Process Model, in which special attention is given to teaching students to help each other revise. When I was a student in elementary and high school, I considered my first draft an all-but-finished product. Students were not allowed to help each other. "Revising" meant copying a paper over again in ink. The teacher, though, usually had a perfectionist mentality, calling for continued revision (or recopying) until the product met innumerable criteria for quality. The criteria, as the behaviorists would say, were not clearly specified. (See Excursion 2, "Revision and Teacher Feedback," for a story about overkill in revision.)

The problem of adequate revision remains. According to the 1977 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Revision Test, most students have a limited concept of revision. In the NAEP tests, students took little advantage of the opportunity to reconsider their work. But when revision through teacher and peer reaction is part of the writing process, students develop a relaxed "first draft mentality" and a healthy attitude towards revising.

The Writing Process Model has certain unique problems. Many teachers find it difficult to create series of activities that flesh out the model—especially language games that evoke appropriate mental processes to link with the desired product. Only a few textbook publishers and curriculum specialists have attempted process-oriented materials. (See textbooks by Olson and by Suhor; videotapes by Cedar Rapids Public Schools, Media Five, and Grossberg.) Also, little attention has been given, other than in laudable efforts like the *Foxfire* books, to finding real audiences for school writing activities (although the ERIC/RCS Clearinghouse at NCTE is preparing a bibliography on audiences for use by classroom teachers).

The Writing Process Model requires that the teacher lead discussions and organize students for group work. This is no easy task in many situations—

for example, in inner city junior high schools where keeping small groups on tasks is difficult; in schools where the principal thinks that students talking in small groups are wasting time; in rural schools where students must often be convinced that speaking up in the classroom is not disrespectful.

Although the Writing Process Model is not intended to be rigid and formulaic, it is subject to abuse. The model represents *one way* of adapting an artificial environment—the classroom—to the varied needs of learners. But learners are a varied lot, and overapplication of the concepts in the model can blur individual differences.

Revision strategies, for example, are idiosyncratic among adults, and we should expect some variation among students. I write or dictate most of my first drafts from notes (as I did with this booklet), then scribble changes over a typewritten copy, often adding handwritten paragraphs on separate sheets, cutting and pasting, and massively deleting. Some students use this style, but others write an entire draft without notes, treating the draft as a meditation for another, more refined draft. One student I knew crumpled and tore early drafts, then reassembled them to create later revisions. I thought his method was hilarious, but he ended up with first-rate writing. (For an excellent treatment of student revision styles, see Kirby and Liner's *Inside Out*.)

Many teachers find it extremely difficult to treat matters of punctuation, spelling, and usage as secondary to elements like organization of ideas and development of a personal style. They have become accustomed to the content area approach, which invites "coverage" of innumerable rules and prescriptions within our discipline. They are not at ease in more dynamic roles: motivator, discussion leader, advisor, and—with relation to mechanics and usage—diagnoser of specific problems and prescriber of needed solutions. (Excursion 3, "The Writing Process, Mechanics and Nonstandard English Usage," sorts out some of these problems, using a student narrative as an example.)

The sequence in the Writing Process Model, as flexible as it is, cannot be followed slavishly. The sequence is not a stairway progression like the Mastery Model. It should be thought of as "looped," not tightly linear, since certain aspects—discussion, conferencing, note-taking, revising, proofreading—may take place at several points, not just in the slots assigned on the visual model.

Finally, let us acknowledge that some aspects of writing instruction do not fall into any of the three models. Cued sentence combining might plug into a Mastery Model, but uncued sentence combining is a valuable technique that does not relate to the models in this booklet. Student journals can be thought of as first drafts for more refined writing, but they have historically been treated as fluency and self-expression activities that need not be refined, and perhaps should not even be read except at the student's request. All of which should keep us honest when we consider models for composition and instruction. There are two ways, it seems, in which educational models can be useful and important—by stimulating us to think about and discuss our teaching, and by reminding us of the old semantic principle that the map, after all, is not the territory.

Nevertheless, I believe that the Writing Process Model is the most useful of the three. Although subject to misuse, it is the most fluid and least confining of the models. It alone is classroom-oriented, guaranteeing an opportunity for students to exchange ideas; it alone provides training in thinking and discussion skills related to compositional goals. It alone reflects writing in the adult world—with a real audience, genuine purpose, and opportunities for reflection, sharing, and revision. It alone is based on observations of skilled classroom teachers and not on academicians' views of what the study of English is all about. At the same time, it alone is consistent with theory and research on how students learn to talk and write.

THREE EXCURSIONS

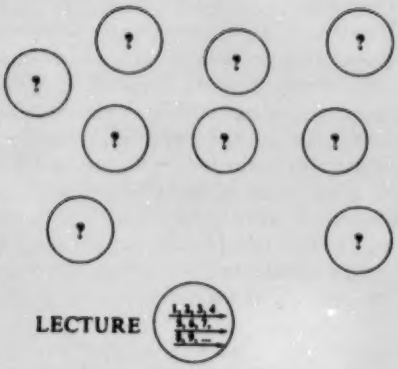
The word "excursus" means a more extended treatment of some point related to the general topic, but it is the kind of word William Buckley uses to make an adversary squirm in a verbal joust. "Excursion" is a bit precious, but it means some very nice things—a going forth, an expedition, a pleasure trip. So let us, without further argument or allusion . . . "excurse."

Excursion 1: talk in the classroom

Looking at the present state of the art of talk in the classroom, we can distinguish five common approaches to the spoken word—lecture, recitation, Socratic method, collective monologue, and interactive discussion (large and small-group). I have diagramed these methods. Their uses and limitations become evident when we ask who, if anyone, is having fun, and what, if anything, is going on inside the student's head when each approach is operating in the classroom.

The lecture. I will be generous and define the lecture as any situation in which one person talks to a group on a sustained basis without the expectation that members of the group will talk back. This definition admits that lectures are valid when certain kinds of information must be given: an explanation of how to get to the gym, instructions on filling out a form, as well as other directional data.

Outside the classroom, lectures can be ceremonially necessary—as an adjunct to social occasions like funerals, banquets, and Fourth of July celebrations. But the classroom lecture is not supported by ceremonial aura, so the lecturer is (or should be) under a particular burden, namely, to be interesting or at least coherent. I once took a graduate course in English literature under a widely published scholar, an ex-preacher who tried to whip up a revival atmosphere in carefully organized 3-hour class lectures. Nevertheless, the effect palled after the second week, and most of the students left the room unedified, indeed exhausted.

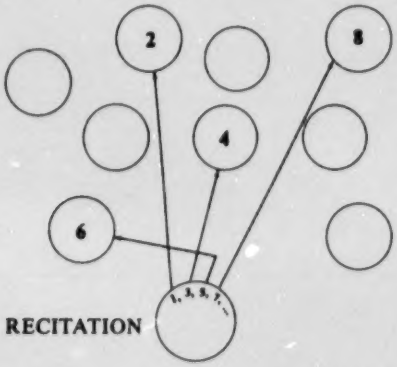


The truth is that almost any classroom lecture would serve its purpose better if it were dittoed and copies distributed to students. They could make marginal notes and then use class time to ask questions or make critical comments on the text. (Of course, Catch-22 is that the teacher who leans on the lecture method is seldom interested in critical response and will avoid it altogether by talking until the end of the period.)

The most crucial thing about any classroom talk is the feelings and mental processes evoked within the student. The lecturer usually fancies that the student is digesting what is heard, filling notebooks with thrilling ideas and cluttering the tabula rasa with mental notes to recollect in tranquillity. Well, maybe some students are doing exactly that, but we do not know. We are certain only that mental activity is going on inside of the teacher's head, where ideas 1-9 are structured and developed, subtleties uncovered, and little ironies noted. There is no indication that students are doing these things, can do these things, or are even expected to do these things—at least not until examination time.

The recitation. I believe that the recitation is the most rigid communication format ever devised. By recitation, I mean a regurgitation of memorized information arranged in this way: Teacher (1) asks/student (2) answers, followed by teacher (3) asks/student (4) answers, followed by—but surely you get the idea.

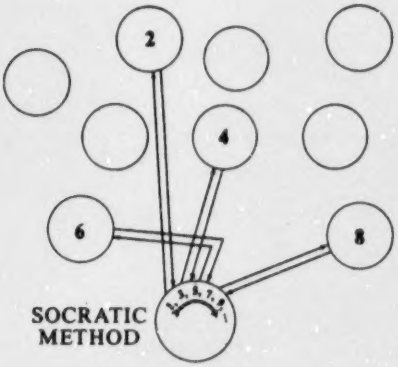
A recitation might demand different kinds of responses, like spelling a word, recalling a fact, parroting the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, or any other rendering of disconnected data that the teacher deems important. The recitation is probably an even less communicative medium than the lecture, because in it information is isolated and devoid of reference to a coherent context of ideas. When the teacher sequences recitation questions along logical lines, the recitation perks up a bit, graduating to an exercise in quasi-Socratic recall—rather like having music students line up at a piano, each playing a single bar of a sonata until its completion.



Studies of teacher-student interaction point to the widespread use of recitation. For instance, Arno Bellack's investigation of New York social studies classes and James Hoetker's study of midwestern junior high English classes show that over 80 percent of teachers' questions called for memorized responses. Hoetker noted that the rate of questioning averaged out at one question every 11.6 seconds! He found that the faster the questioning (and the more dependent the questions were on rote memorization), the fewer the proportion of correct answers and the less teacher-pupil interaction.

For me, the ultimate recitation experience was in the Army. Every time we came off the rifle range at boot camp, the company commander would call the roll of the entire battery. The purpose was to discourage—maybe even uncover—soldiers who were smuggling bullets off the post. Each man, when his name was called, was to answer, "No brass, Sir!" to indicate that he was not a bullet-snatcher. Halfway through the alphabet you could sense that no one was listening or caring, least of all those with bullets. I heard my name and bellowed "Nebraska!" The rest of the battery, from Sweeny to Yankovich, hollered "Nebraska!" too, and no one ever noticed the difference. I often wonder if I could have gotten away with "Oklahoma!"

The Socratic method. Surely, the Socratic method is the most overrated teaching device going. It has its uses, of course, but its main flaw is that in the method there is only one Socrates, namely, the teacher. Basically, the Socratic method consists of the teacher asking crafty leading questions that prompt students to mull over a problem until they come to an insightful conclusion. Presumably, all are astonished that the students had the ability to solve the problem, and all can leave the room thinking better of themselves.



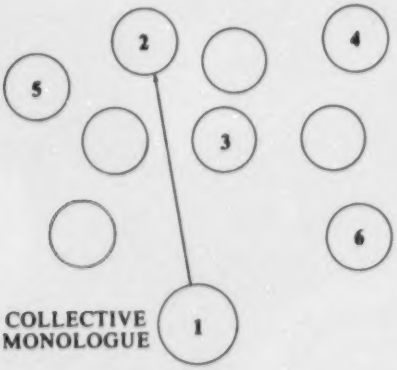
"I only teach you what you already know," Socrates said to his students. In most contemporary Socratic discussions, the motto is, "I only teach you what I already know." The teacher-Socrates is not midwife to the ideas that are generated. Rather, with the conclusion (9) already determined, the teacher asks the questions (1, 3, 5, 7) that will lead the students (2, 4, 6, 8) in a linear manner to the same "discovery." As questioner, the teacher manipulates the direction of the discussion, suggests the relationships among ideas that are evolved, and determines what is pertinent and what is digressive.

Again, the important question is: What is going on inside the students' heads? They might be deeply absorbed in the discussion as the ideas unfold under the teacher's penetrating questions. They might well be learning how to answer difficult questions. But they have not learned how to pose them. The problem with many bright students is not that they cannot respond to hard questions, but that they do not know what questions to ask when confronted with a problem situation. With the Socratic method, the ability to discover the problematical element in an event or a text has been usurped by the teacher-Socrates, who has on hand a ready supply of *leading*—the adjective is significant—questions.

The student is only a witness to the brilliant structuring of a discussion. The art of questioning is the teacher's art, and the student's role is to reply

thoughtfully within the conceptual limits set by the question. Remember what Menon said to Socrates: "You seem to argue well, Socrates. I don't know how you do it."

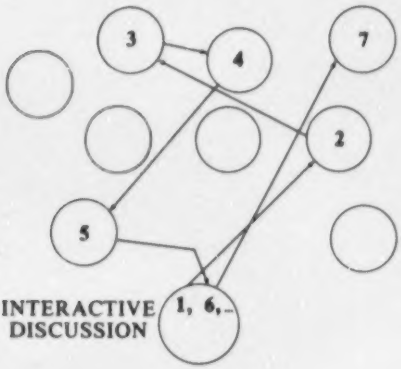
The collective monologue. Piaget first applied the term "collective monologue" to small children who, being basically egocentric and unsocialized, speak out their thoughts without regard to whether anyone is actually listening and without attention to what has been previously said. Of course, mature discourse involves seeing relationships among ideas and shaping them in interaction with others. The collective monologue is a regression to an infantile pattern—in Piaget's phrase, "soliloquizing before others."



In a 10th-grade class, students have just seen the film, "The Lady or the Tiger," a modernized version of the old story by Frank Stockton. The lights go on, and the talking begins.

(1) Teacher:	Well, what do you think?
(2) Bobby:	I'll bet the tiger came out. The princess didn't look like she was about to let the man marry another woman. No woman would.
(3) Helen:	One thing I didn't understand was the crowd scene and how it tied in with the story.
(4) Steve:	The color was really pretty, though.
(5) Janet:	I read that story a couple of years ago. I liked it better than the film.
(6) Ed:	I prefer the film we saw last week—you know, the one about the guy climbing a mountain?

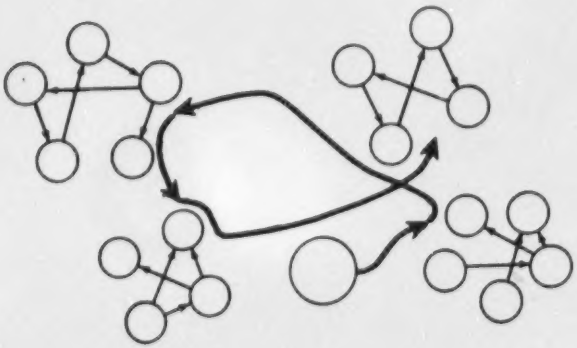
There is plenty of student talk, a minimum of teacher interference, but it adds up to very little. The students are relaxed. And their language is reasonably fluent; yet their comments have an ad hoc quality. Each student speaks as if no one had said anything before, and no one would say anything after. The exchange of ideas never happens. This kind of student intra-action, which all too often passes for genuine discussion, is really collective monologue. The teacher, not wanting to be directive, permits the students to ramble aimlessly. Instead of stepping in just long enough to invite development of an interesting idea, like Helen's, or to ask for an option that might contrast to Bobby's sexist statement, the teacher allows each student to take a turn at making a comment, as if each were delivering a brief extemporaneous address to no one in particular. The class is strong on self-expression, but weak on communication.



Interactive discussion. Genuine class discussion is enjoyable verbal interaction with cognitive glue provided by several discussants, not just the teacher or a discussion leader. It matters not who begins to talk as long as the exchange hangs together from speaker to speaker, and no single person or subgroup acts as custodian of the content or controller of its structure. The teacher can start things off (1), then stay in the background while following the progress of the discussion, observing the breadth of participation and considering the assumptions and values underlying the students' comments, (2) through (5). This is not to say that a discussion which crumbles into a collective monologue cannot be manipulated directly by the teacher if no one else pulls it back together. In fact, one of the dreariest of all discussion techniques is the Great Freeze—in which the teacher, determined not to impose a preconceived structure on the discussion, puts full responsibility on young, often self-conscious students to initiate and sustain a lively exchange.

Undoubtedly, some discussions deserve to die with dignity, but a teacher who never lends a hand gives the students no model for reviving a flagging discussion. When things get tangled or downright monotonous, the teacher as noted at point (6) should exercise prodding privileges. This can mean playing devil's advocate, moving to a related topic, returning to an undeveloped point, or whatever is necessary. Sooner or later, the teacher should be able to fade away and let the students discuss things among themselves. But any teacher who wants to play no part in classroom talk to begin with should retire to the lounge or go home and write articles for *PMLA* .

Interactive discussion (small-group). Once students have been given models of interactive discussion in the whole-class setting, they can go on to work in small-group discussion. As the diagram shows, small groups of four or five students are interacting in the manner of the larger group. Earlier in this booklet, I acknowledged the difficulty of doing small-group work with, say, inner city seventh-graders who are unaccustomed to sustained give-and-take discussion. But careful planning can keep the necessary balance between firm educational purpose and fluid, spontaneous discussion. The crucial points are task orientation and selecting groups.



- *Task orientation:* When students are placed in small groups, they should have a clear sense of specific tasks. They may grow noisy in carrying out those tasks—thus, your administrator should know about your goals and methods—but the noise is evidence of learning. Examples of purposeful tasks for a peer feedback discussion can be found in the section on feedback in the Writing Process Model.

- *Selecting groups:* There are many ways in which small groups can be constituted. (1) A simple way is to use the ready-made "geography" of the classroom, clustering students who happen to be near one another. (2) Self-selection among students might be used in situations that do not pose classroom management problems. Often, however, self-selection places bashful students in difficult situations, or it permits them to find groups that will let them sit in silence. (3) Teacher selection can be used as a way of structuring groups in ways that will make them most helpful to most students. Quite frankly, it is often used to separate students who might dominate a particular group or who might create discipline problems within the same group. (4) Random selection can sometimes be used to good effect. It can be accomplished by such means as shuffling class cards and then counting them out, by drawing lots, or by using alphabetical groupings.

  Probably a good overall rule for selecting groups is that there should be no single rule. Groups should be fluid so that each student is able to exchange ideas with many classmates. Assigning or selecting static, year-round groups limits the kind of cross-fertilization that small-group work is intended to accomplish.

- *Monitoring groups:* Small-group discussion, like whole-class discussion, should be informal. But informality, if not adequately monitored, can drift into idle chatter. To keep the groups energetic and on the task, the teacher must be constantly "group-hopping"—walking about casually, tuning in on the line of discussion in the various groups, occasionally arbitrating points in dispute, offering sporadic comments or compliments—without ever taking actual control of the discourse. Inevitably, some groups will need pump-priming to get started, or a gentle nudge to remind them that there is a specific goal to be achieved. With practice and healthy monitoring, students do learn how to work in groups and how to distinguish group discussion from rambling conversation.

Some resouces for background and classroom ideas on small-group dicussion are Klein's *Talk in the Language Arts Classroom*, Stanford and Stanford's *Learning Discussion Skills Through Games*, Stanford's *Developing Effective Classroom Groups*, and Moffett and Wagner's *StudentCentered Curriculum in Language Arts and Reading, K-13.*

Think about it for a moment: Talk in the classroom is the one irreducibly human activity that is within the realm of all teachers—especially teachers of the English language arts. It is the bulwark against numerous antitalk technologies—the solitary confinement of carrels, cassettes, and computers that talk back to students. In "2001: A Space Odyssey," the computer, "Hal," was virtually indistinguishable from a human respondent. We have yet to become that adept at faking human personhood, but there is a computer at the University of Akron that is as puritanical as any teacher. The machine is programed to rebuke students who address it in foul language. After three offenses, the computer threatens to quit, holding its services

as ransom until the student apologizes.

Probably, computers can help students directly in ways other than scheduling their classes and reminding them of overdue library books. But a machine is, to steal LeRoi Jones' phrase, a dead lecturer—even if you could program it to wash your mouth out with soap, or put it inside a lifelike manikin and get it to gesticulate like an ex-preacher delivering a lecture on Swinburne.

I strongly feel that the definition of human nature has something to do with human consciousness, and with the difference between a gesticulating manikin and a real ex-preacher, between Hal and the human beings in "2001." I also believe that human nature is urgently linked with talk, and that talk is what education should be more about. (Note: The "Talk in the Classroom" materials originally appeared in slightly different forms in *Media & Methods* (April, 1975) and *Scholastic Composition* Teacher's Guide (1980). Reprinted by permission.)

Excursion 2: Revision and teacher feedback

In discussing feedback for revision in the Writing Process Model, I spoke of two extremes—the student's characteristic distaste for revision and the well-intentioned teacher's demand for perfection in student writings. Two of my favorite literary anecdotes illustrate that concern about these extremes exists for adult writers. Jack Kerouac, the father of the "Beat Generation," once claimed that he wrote his celebrated novel, *On The Road*, in a series of sittings with no revision whatever. A fellow author came up with the classic squelch: "That's not writing—that's *typing*."

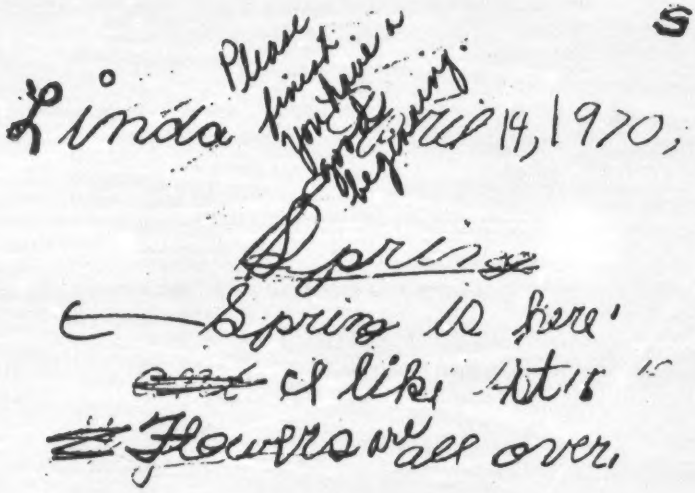
The noted humorist S. J. Perelman, responding to a question about how many drafts he did on his stories, said "Thirty-seven. I once tried 33, but something was lacking, a certain—how shall I say?—*je ne sais quoi*. On another occasion, I tried 42 versions, but the final effort was too lapidary."

Kerouac—if he was not kidding—was extremely lucky, because *On The Road* is a book that captured his vision with remarkable clarity. He risked a great deal in choosing to type rather than write. His genius carried him through in *On the Road*, I believe, in a way that it never did again. Most of us are not so lucky or so gifted.

Perelman was ridiculing the other extreme—the tendency to believe that one can bludgeon a piece of writing into shape, given enough time and enough paper. I have already endorsed without apology systematic revision that makes use of one's own resources, and others' as well. So I trust that my presentation of "Linda's Rewrite" below will be seen in the context of the positive suggestions elsewhere in this booklet. Incidentally, I originally found Linda's papers in a stack of student writings collected over several years when I was working as a K-12 English supervisor in New Orleans public schools. My efforts at tracking her down, (and Ms. Blank, too) were unsuccessful.

> I never met Linda. But when a teacher—let's call her Mrs. Blank, for want of a worse name—showed me the work Linda did in her third grade class, I fell in love with her (Linda, that is, not the teacher) immediately.

Linda was a tried-and-true sufferer. She suffered through what Mrs. Blank called a "creative writing lesson." If there's anything to the old romantic idea that creativity is born of pain, then Linda, wherever she is today, must be acrackle with creativity.

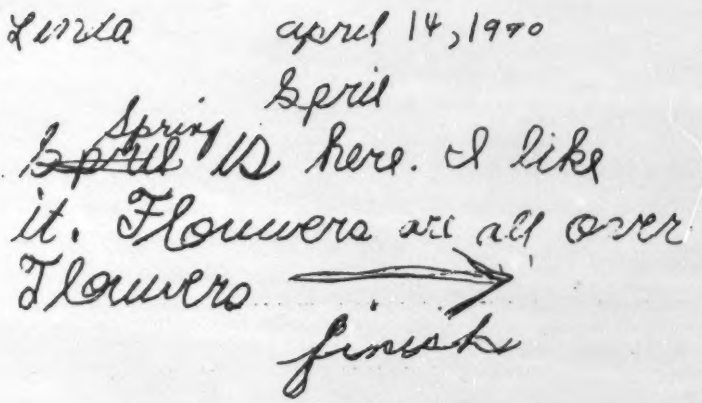


Draft No. 1

You get the idea right off that Linda knows what she's in for. Her first effort is already a rewrite, written over an earlier erased copy.

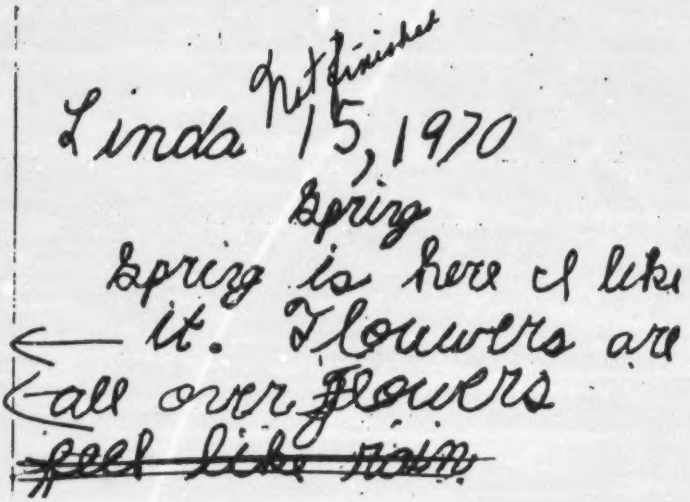
If Linda was expecting feedback, Mrs. Blank didn't disappoint her. The "corrected" paper is hemorrhaging with good advice—like changing Linda's first compound sentence into two simple ones. And Linda had better take care to use block-style paragraphing if she doesn't want another one of those big red arrows on the next draft.

Does Linda believe and appreciate the compliment at the top of the page? Look closely at the light pencil markings she has made through Mrs. Blank's encouraging words. I wonder.



Draft No. 2

Linda is neater, all right, but she seems a bit detached on the second draft. " Spril"? And what the hell, it was too nice a day to finish that sentence anyway. More advice in scarlet. And this time, Linda's revenge is to trace over the helpful hints, VERY DARK, in blue ballpoint.



Draft No. 3

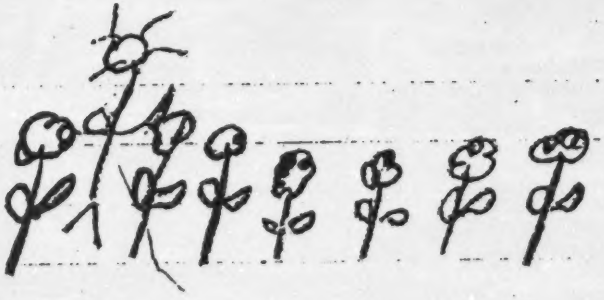
This time Linda has come up with a stunningly original image: "Flowers feel like rain."

But Mrs. Blank vetoes it. And why not? Everyone knows that you connect flowers with "smelling" and "seeing," not "feeling." Who ever heard of "feeling" a flower?

Linda April 16, 1970

Spring

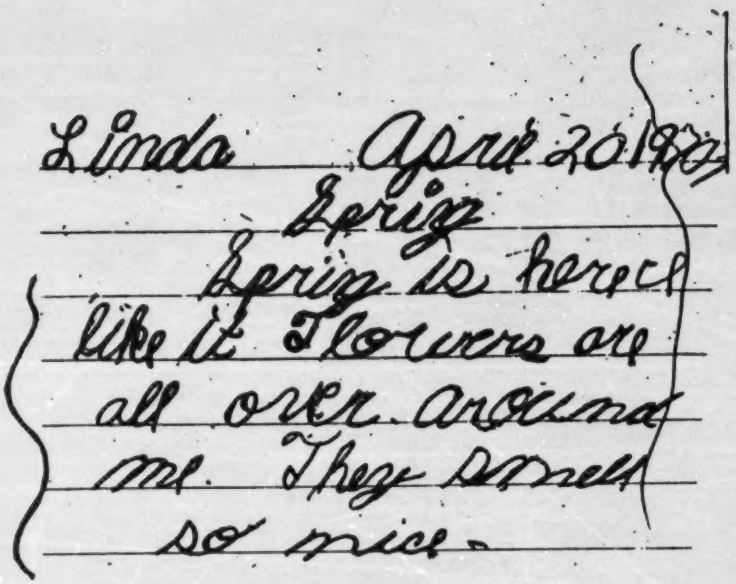
Spring is here. I like it. Flowers are all over. Flowers are all around me. They smell so nice.



Draft No. 4

Here Mrs. Blank settles for all times the question of the proper relationship between flowers and the human sensorium. They smell, get it?

Linda is beginning to despair of the written word as a means of communicating the idea of "Spring" to Mrs. Blank. Look, Mrs. Blank, it's like this, see? Flowers. Different colors. Growth, life, energy. See? Sorry, Linda, pictures don't count.

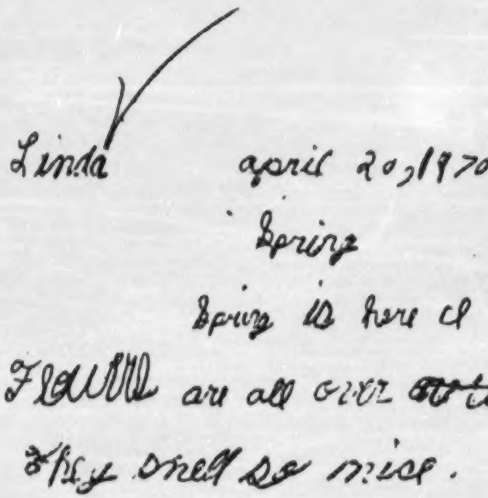


Draft No. 5

Four days later, and another try at capturing the elusive nature of Spring.

Gone are the graphics and subversive imagery. Straight-ahead prose this time, as assigned.

But watch your margins.


Linda april 20, 1970
Spring
Spring is here & like it
Flowers are all over ~~around~~ me.
They smell so nice.

Draft No. 6.

Notice how Linda's handwriting is taking on a cramped, tortured look. Five days have passed since she started this paean to Spring, and it looks like her only hope is for an early summer and a chance to start all over with a new season.

To make matters worse, Linda has taken to doubling her prepositions: "Flowers are all over around me." (She did it on the fifth draft, too, but Mrs. Blank didn't notice.)

Back to the drawing board.

Linda April 20, 1970

Spring is here & like it
Flowers are all over around me.
They smell so nice.

Draft No. 7

Linda has writer's cramp in the extreme. But she would take heart if she only realized that Mrs. Blank is wearing down, too.

Remember? Mrs. Blank started out with copious notes in brilliant red. Switched to a blue pen in Draft No. 5, a pencil in Draft No. 6, and is nowhere to be seen in this draft. Mrs. Blank has lost her hot hand.

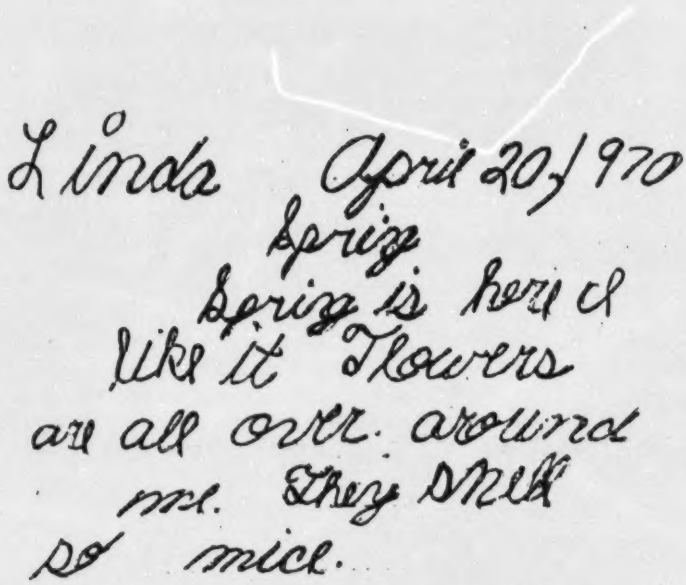
Linda April 20 1970

Spring

Spring is here. I
like it. Flowers are all over
around me They smell so nice

Draft No. 8

It's true. No more feedback. Mrs. Blank has given up. Wishes she'd never made the damned assignment. Linda senses her advantage and is pressing on.


Linda April 20, 1970
Spring
Spring is here I
like it Flowers
are all over. around
me. They smell
so nice.

Draft No. 9

Has Linda achieved a kind of perverse victory over Mrs. Blank? Is she putting Mrs. Blank on with the return to the big, wholesome letters of Drafts 1 through 5? Has she left out the period after "here" and added one after "over" just to bedevil Mrs. Blank, to challenge her to yet another round of I-goof, you-correct?

Linda has no mercy. How can Mrs. Blank react to that corker of a final sentence: "They snell so mice"!

The End? Not Quite.

There was one final draft, hanging on the bulletin board in Mrs. Blank's room, a draft that proved Linda had lost after all.

There were no errors in Draft No. 10. It was absolutely sanitary—correct capitalization, neat margins, good punctuation—the works. Draft No. 10 was so sanitary, in fact, that it was sterile. No imagery, no vitality, no sense of joy or discovery, nothing to suggest that Linda had ever related to Spring in any way.

Of course, Linda did learn something from her rewrite sessions. She learned that:

1. Rules are more important than expression. Master the right forms, appearances and conventions of writing, and it won't matter if you have nothing to say.

2. Ideas and perspectives that are out of the ordinary aren't acceptable. If people before you liked to feel silk, smell flowers and listen to lyric sopranos, you have no business going around listening to silk, feeling flowers or smelling lyric sopranos.

3. Writing is a tedious, demeaning and hateful task. Do it only when you must and when everything expected of you is fully explained, as on Blue Cross forms and loan applications. Writing is, after all, a matter of satisfying the person forcing you to write.

I believe that this negative kind of learning is less prevalent today than it was in the past. But I still come across meticulously arranged bulletin boards decorated with gold-starred student essays. And I can't help wondering how many Lindas suffered through how many rewrites to produce those perfectly symmetrical rows of perfectly bland papers.

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Excursion 3: The writing process, mechanics, and nonstandard English

In this excursion, I use a student writing sample as a basis for discussing teaching Edited American English (including usage, punctuation, and spelling) to students who speak nonstandard dialects. Here's a black ninth-grader's writing, after editing and proofreading.

I am afraid of the Word "Death" and Darkness—Why?

It all started when I was about six. My nieces and nephew, who are older than me, started telling me about monsters, ghosts, bogey men. I would be afraid of the dark, anticipating that I might see one of those ghouls in the dark.

My Mom and Dad never did like to whip me, so they would sometimes lock me in the dark bathroom. I guess they didn't know I would be extremely afraid, otherwise they wouldn't have put me in there. When they would take me to church with them on Sunday nights, the pastor's main subject, the one he would stress the most, was God, eternal light for those who are Christians after DEATH. Death—that word makes me so afraid when I hear someone using it, it makes me think of a cold, damp grave of someone who is going to die, or is dead already. Many, many nights I would lie down in bed and think how it would feel when my mother and father were dead. Sometimes I'd turn over with an eyeful of tears. My mind would go blank and I would fall off to sleep. But on the other hand somehow in my sleep I could feel that word DEATH fighting for all it was worth to reach the part of my brain that would bring it out and make me think about it again.

Then when I was about eight, I went to Uncle Herbert's funeral. That did it, all I wanted to do was RUN!, fast, out of that place as fast as I could. There he was, lying in that oblong box, looking so sad. My mother and father quietly brought me up to the casket to view the body. I felt weak or faint at first, then I got ice cold. In my mind all I was saying to myself was "Lord, let me out, away from here."

Finally, the preacher arrived. He gave the eulogy of my uncle's life. The Masons were standing on each side of the casket with the traditional spears crossed over. As the choir began to sing "Nearer My God to Thee," I began to get colder, colder, and colder.

That wasn't the bad part. Lord have mercy, when those people, especially my aunt, started crying, screaming, and hollering, I felt numb, then I wanted to run away or die.

Death to me is like the darkness in the silence of the night, a lonely ghost searching for his soul. Sometimes my mother would talk to me about the dead. She would say, "The dead can't do you no harm, just look out for the living."

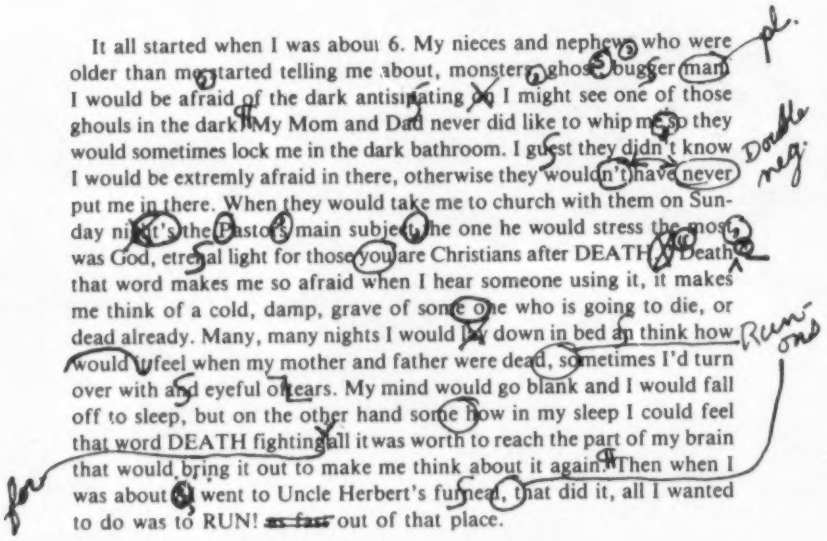
She said, "The dead can't do you no harm."

Oh yes, they can sure scare you to death.

—Sylvia N.

When Sylvia's teacher shared this remarkable sketch with me, I was struck by two things. First, the writing was clear, honest, and effective, even in the roughest first draft. By calling on the student's store of personal experiences,

the teacher had helped Sylvia to create a narrative that has an authentic voice and carries a clear sense of the writer's experience. Second, the teacher's initial response to the paper was one of encouragement, commenting on the fundamental effectiveness of the writing. In the edited version presented above, none of the nonstandard usages or errors in spelling and punctuation were included. Part of the original version is presented below, along with the numerous corrections the teacher did *not* make. Had the teacher been on a conventional error hunt, the paper that Sylvia got back might have looked like this:



It all started when I was about 6. My nieces and nephews who were older than me started telling me about, monsters, ghosts, bugger man. I would be afraid of the dark antisipating so I might see one of those ghouls in the dark. My Mom and Dad never did like to whip me so they would sometimes lock me in the dark bathroom. I guest they didn't know I would be extremly afraid in there, otherwise they wouldn't have never put me in there. When they would take me to church with them on Sunday night's the Pastor's main subject, the one he would stress the most, was God, eternal light for those you are Christians after DEATH. Death that word makes me so afraid when I hear someone using it, it makes me think of a cold, damp, grave of some one who is going to die, or dead already. Many, many nights I would lay down in bed an think how would I feel when my mother and father were dead, sometimes I'd turn over with a sad eyeful of tears. My mind would go blank and I would fall off to sleep, but on the other hand some how in my sleep I could feel that word DEATH fighting all it was worth to reach the part of my brain that would bring it out to make me think about it again. Then when I was about 9 I went to Uncle Herbert's funeral, that did it, all I wanted to do was to RUN! ~~as fast~~ out of that place.

The effect would certainly have been disastrous. Happily, Sylvia was not another Linda, and her teacher was not another Ms. Blank. (Actually, the teacher was Betty Monroe, who is now an evaluation specialist in New Orleans public schools.) Sylvia's writing talent might never have emerged in a content area approach, and her gifts might not have survived an error-oriented response.

But surely, we must look more closely at the question of errors in mechanics, spelling, and usage. Until now, I have been lumping problems of Nonstandard English (NSE) usage in student writing with errors in mechanics and spelling. These problems do have certain things in common. They rarely, if ever, relate to substantive aspects of a piece of writing—quality of thought, structural integrity, imaginative language, and the like. They are

best attended to in the late stages of revision, although students looking at substantive aspects in the early stages often "catch" NSE and mechanical errors along the way, just as you and I do. Another commonality is that NSE and mechanical errors can be treated through diagnosis and prescription. Just as student problems with regard to using the comma differ, students display a selective command of Standard English (SE) usage. There is no more need for a comprehensive review of usage each year than there is for wide-ranging coverage of each mark of punctuation. In each case, diagnosis of actual student writing and prescription of appropriate corrective activities are good approaches.*

Despite similarities, it is deceptive and unrealistic to treat NSE problems in writing as if they were mere conventions on a par with uses of the apostrophe and the correct spelling of "receive." To begin with, NSE is an element in both oral and written language, whereas mechanics and spelling are peculiar to the written word. All children come to the print medium with very little initial knowledge of conventions of mechanics and spelling. The SE and NSE speaker alike must learn about commas surrounding apositives and capitalization of "captain" if they are to master Edited American English.

Such is not the case with mastering usage aspects of Edited American English. Some students come to the printed word with command of basic SE forms—standard subject-verb agreement, pluralizations, past tense forms—simply because those forms are part of the dialects of their nurture. Other students begin school after having learned an equally systematic and coherent language—but one which includes numerous NSE features. Many of those NSE features are linked closely with class differences in society, and sometimes with racial differences. It is naive and disingenuous to create an umbrella called "Edited American English" (the going buzzphrase in the profession) or invoke an oversized concept like "grapholect," and assume that nonstandard usage falls under these categories in a manner comparable to mechanics and spelling.

Stated another way, no child comes to school with an alternative repertoire of punctuation and spelling rules; but the NSE speaker arrives with a dialect whose grammatical rules vary in noticeable ways from those of SE. Other things being equal, the NSE speaker and the SE speaker will be equally prepared to learn the conventions of punctuation (and, given the arbitrariness of much of our spelling system, those of spelling). But NSE speakers must go through extra steps as they adjust to some of the SE demands of Edited American English.

Note the use of "some" in the previous sentence. Recently reported research (Rubin, 1979; Reed, 1982; Whiteman, 1982) reveals that NSE *speakers* shift to SE forms to a surprisingly large extent when they are *writing*. Many (though

* Obviously, the initial teaching of writing in elementary grades calls for other approaches. For example, see the grade 2, 4, and 5 writing programs by two classroom teachers, Vera Milz and Joanne Yatvin, in *Perspectives on Writing, Grades 1-8* (edited by Shirley Haley-James). Their programs are research-based, consistent with important studies by Clay, Graves, and others.

not all) NSE usages diminish greatly or virtually disappear as the students move from a less formal register to a more formal one—i.e., from speaking to writing. The NSE spoken language usages that persist in writing tend to be easily diagnosed and few in number (e.g., omission of *-ed* on past tenses, omission of copulative verb *be*). And such NSE forms are found in the writings of both black and white NSE speakers.

NSE speakers, then, are more adept than previously thought at "code-switching" as they adjust to the more formal SE language demands of writing. But the adjustment is neither total nor automatic, and there is very little agreement in the profession about when and how to ask the NSE student to make the adjustment. Should we "get them while they're young," say, in grades K-4? Should we deal with the spoken versions of the written NSE forms first? Most teachers that I know agree that no student at any grade level should be stopped in mid-sentence during class discussion in order to "correct" NSE usages. It is fashionable nowadays to claim that we need not interfere with student's NSE in oral language at all, because we can deal with the NSE problems that matter through teaching writing at all grade levels. Some teachers go a bit further, saying that in elementary and middle school writing instruction, at least, students' writing should seldom be corrected for NSE. These teachers feel that emphasis in early grades should be on fluency, expressiveness, and organization. Concern with NSE, they believe, inhibits students' writing and carries implicit negative judgments about their homes and subcultures.

The radical stance of the late 1960's—that society is wrong in demanding that either oral or written language conform to a single set of SE usages—is not in favor today. I believe that the moral position of the late 1960's was correct in principle. But I would not try to peddle it as a blueprint for curriculum in today's world. Research by Labov and other sociolinguists supports the idea that NSE dialects in America are, in themselves, quite adequate for purposes of logical argumentation, metaphorical expression, and other communicative functions. Only social intolerance retards the development of a wider range of NSE communications in society. As individuals and as English teachers, we should be chipping away at popular prejudices which identify nonstandard dialects with "sloppy thinking" or low intelligence.

But again in the real world, Standard English Usage—oral and written—can be one important factor in getting employed, staying employed, and moving ahead. We need to train speakers and writers who can function in society. As noted earlier, skill in assessing social situations and adjusting language appropriately is part of what linguists now call "communicative competence."

Granting, then, that students must be given the opportunity to learn an Edited American English that includes SE usage, *how* can we teach these things? Here, too, are degrees of opinion, from those who would start small children with rigid oral language drills (e.g., the DISTAR program) to those who claim that the teacher's daily use of SE and inclusion of role-playing in the classroom will suffice. Presumably, students who role-play individuals in different social situations—like principals, postal workers, business people, radio and TV announcers, construction workers—will act on the understanding that they should accomodate their language to the demands of various social contexts.

Opinions about methodology for teaching Standard English, like opinions on when to begin SE instruction, are often based on ideology rather than on classroom work with NSE-speaking students. If there is a consensus among classroom teachers that I have met, it probably runs something like this:

- Students who are not *motivated* to use Standard English will not respond to any method, from the most rigid to the most "open"; by contrast, motivated students seems to tune into Standard English, oral and written. This view has some support in research on students' use of SE and NSE usages, and it is a good common-sense view as well.

- Students who do not gain *some* command of key SE usages in oral form generally do not show marked progress in using SE in their writing. This simple fact is overlooked by those who would treat teaching of SE as part of proofreading, along with punctuation and spelling.

- Approaches that call for translating abstract rules into practice are basically ineffective, except perhaps with a handful of motivated, older (from 11th grade upwards), and brighter students.

- Careful analysis of students' NSE problems in writing, followed by contrastive study of the relevant SE and NSE forms (as suggested in Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*) is preferable to grosser forms of diagnosis and prescription.

- Finally, parents of NSE-speaking students usually disagree with—indeed, despise—the notion that society is wrong, and that their children should not have to kowtow to a classist, racist language tradition. And even if they agree in principle with the radical viewpoint, as I do, they are understandably unwilling to sacrifice their children on that particular battlefield. Nor am I willing to do so.

I was born and raised in an NSE dialect community—New Orleans' ninth ward. I learned some SE at home, and some in elementary and high school. In my writing, I always employed SE far more consistently than in my speaking. But I did not become really motivated until college, when I mingled with many SE speakers for the first time. I loint I oughta keep ahold of nint' ward talk in da neighbahood, because it's sometimes useful, and always expressive; but I did some heavy code-switching at the university. My native dialect lives on somewhat in my children's language and my own, but I am just bourgeois enough to want them to have command of SE as well, in both oral and written forms.

As a parent, teacher, and citizen, I worry a lot about these things. About society's use of SE as a device of maintaining class privileges. About John

Simon and Richard Mitchell and others who spread misinformation about language. About my responsibilities to my children and to other people's children. About creating curricula that deal with all of these intractable ambiguities. About the fact that I might be flat wrong about these things.

On the assumption that we must weigh the evidence on hand, work at best with an uneasy consensus, and then act, I will posit some recommendations about Standard English usage in the K-12 English curriculum.

- At all grade levels, consider these as essential methods for teaching Standard English: the teacher's oral language and writing as a model; use of some (but not all) materials read in class as models; role-playing games in which children get into different characterizations that require a variety of dialects.

- In the elementary grades, concentrate on such things as fluency, imagination, idea/story content, and basic organization in student writing, along the lines of Kenneth Koch's poetry games, James Britton's "expressive writing," and Ken Macrorie's "free writing." If questions about standard usage arise—as they often will, as a result of children's curiosity about language differences—do not shrink from them; but try not to begin a crusade for the abolition of NSE.

- In the junior and senior high grades, assess whether or not NSE speakers can be truly motivated to learn SE usages as alternative dialect forms. If so, proceed with diagnostic and prescriptive teaching rather than wide-ranging "coverage" of SE usages. Use whatever humane techniques that work best with your students; ideology be damned. Remember that pattern practices had a respectable research history in the late 1960's and early 1970's but were shouted down by those who felt that SE instruction in general was racist, and that pattern practices in particular were Skinnerian. Whatever the technique, keep a light hand so students feel that you are guiding their learning rather than policing their language.

- At all levels, look for gradual change rather than quick results. Recall that abstract approaches to instruction held sway for generations, supported by textbooks, handbooks, and annual repetition of definitions and rules—and it worked with precious few students. The main reasons for the appearance of efficacy were attrition, since relatively few NSE students completed high school in previous generations, and lack of real writing in programs dominated by drill. Now that we are expecting students and adults to compose, not just ingest information about language, we have reason to hope that more students will be more concerned about effective communication—including the appropriate use of Standard English. But we are dealing with language habits, not blocks of information

that can be added, discarded, or rearranged at will. We must look for results, but not a quick fix on age-old problems.

- At all grade levels, help students develop a sense of power over language in its various forms. Talk about *different* ways of speaking and writing rather than good and bad, right and wrong, standard and substandard, educated and ignorant. It is imperative to respect the students' language even as we help them to grow more flexible, more sophisticated, and more thoughtful about how they speak and write

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